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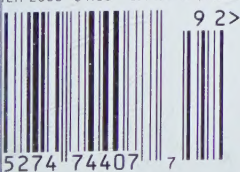
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of the Lilith TV Show

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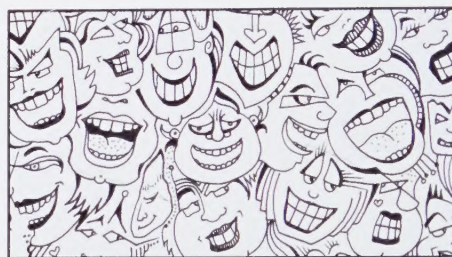
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Flash's Ultimate Beauty Tip:



FORGET IT!

Forget the colors, creams, powders.
Forget diet, exercise, surgery.



The way to appear beautiful
is to make people laugh.



It's a physiological fact.
When people laugh, their eyes squint,
and they can't see too well.
If they look at you while laughing -
YOU LOOK GREAT!

Flash Rosenberg

Attention Span for Hire
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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, “We are equal because we are created from the same earth.”

Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b



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by Amy Stone

Understanding the existential power of these ultimate rituals, visionary women are now taking control, engaging with traditional practices while creating new ways to mark this final lifecycle event. Baby namings for girls, egalitarian weddings and divorces—these you know. But what makes a good funeral? And why does it matter how you memorialize a woman? Rabbis, funeral directors and feminist icons weigh in on how to revise this ceremonial passage.

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When we're editing an issue of *Lilith*, often a single subject takes center stage and stays there; much of the content seems to accrete around one theme, like iron filings toward a magnet.



This time was different.

First we settled on the fiction. In a year when racial diversity is evident in the White House, in synagogue pews, in Jewish nursery schools and in the pulpit, two powerfully told vignettes pulled us into worlds very different from our own: the Civil War and the years right after the WWI. Each story is embedded in an era when perceived boundaries between groups felt impermeable, and for a time all articles we read seemed to us to focus on race.

But then...a feature we had been discussing for months began to take shape: the report on new and old end-of-life rituals women are adapting right now. As some *Lilith* reports do, the section "Feminist Funerals" had its origin in a wide-ranging conversation many months ago around the *Lilith* library table. Interns, editors, board members and a couple of visitors began

number of shrinks are Jewish (and so many now are Jewish *women*) how did this transplant from Israeli TV manage to win us over with an Irish-American psychotherapist and a cast of patients that doesn't seem to include even a one Jew? Don't know, but I was hooked from Season One on the unfolding dramas in these

lives, and how the characters grapple with them. They're powerfully engaging precisely because they mostly seem an awful lot like the rest of us. The allure of the show's individual narratives is undeniable, maybe variant iterations of the first-person narratives we get at the *Lilith* office.

Lilith's mission has always been to amplify the many *different* voices of Jewish women, and this issue's abundance of thoughtful perspectives—on relations between Jews and others, on cleaning house, on a mature daughter's memories of an unforgivable father—renders vibrant voices on every page. So what does the rich variety on this buffet of subject matter prove? That not one size fits all? Maybe. But more than emphasizing that your individual experiences will likely direct you first to one piece or

putting together the issue: an inside peek at how it happens

to talk about what makes a "good" funeral. The working title was uttered—"feminist funerals"—and it stuck. When the first drafts of Amy Stone's piece arrived at *Lilith*, our in-office conversations shifted, and we spoke about Jewish funeral traditions, about older widows who take charge of their lives in dramatic ways after the death of a spouse, about eulogies women are now delivering to memorialize female friends and relations, about why unveilings are such a do-it-yourself responsibility. You get it; we became a little obsessed with the subject.

And still later... *Lilith* fiction editor Yona Zeldis McDonough met feminist luminary and critic Elaine Showalter one evening. The scholar mentioned her devotion to the HBO hit "In Treatment." What an opportunity for us to learn Showalter's views on a show so many people, I among them, are addicted to watching! So we emailed, she responded, and now you get to find out what she thinks, and why this series is so compelling to women. Especially in the U.S., where a disproportionate

another, the range in this issue reflects the complexities of what you, and we, are interested in—namely, all of it. We like to learn about women like—and unlike—ourselves. Eve Coulson, a *Lilith* board member, host of a long-running *Lilith* salon in Princeton, nailed it when she described *Lilith* recently: "It's an ongoing conversation and idea exchange."

Welcome to the conversation—in print, on the web, and in person at a *Lilith* salon near you. Share your ideas and talk back to *Lilith's* authors and editors at Lilith.org.

It's your turn now.

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

CORRECTION: The image of Samuel Grossman's play, "A Woman's Duty in Birth Control," which ran in the spring issue, was used courtesy of the Hebraic Section at the Library of Congress.



Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public lest it arouse men.
These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Biblical Women's Stories, Told on a Fiddle

What do biblical women's stories, klezmer-punk with a side order of bluegrass and Central America have in common? **Alicia Jo Rabins**, whose well-deserved personal tagline is "fiddler extraordinaire." Rabins, perhaps best known in Jewish circles for her fast fiddling with the band Golem, popular for their unique klezmer-punk fusions, has recently launched a new project: *Girls in Trouble*. The group's first album, due out the day after Yom Kippur in 2009 (and put out by Jdub, the same label that carries Golem), will hopefully carry on with Rabins's work so far: exploring the lives and stories of biblical women. The preview tracks available online are lovely, with Rabins's clarion-clear strings underlying melodic vocals, strong percussive beats, and lyrics that seem strangely familiar—these women, for all their unique experiences, could be women from our own day.

"Essentially, what draws me to these stories is their darkness," Rabins told *Lilith*. "The girls (and women) in these stories really *are* in trouble, and often, the trouble gets written on their bodies: Miriam's leprosy, Dinah's alleged rape, or the sacrifice story of Yiftach's daughter. There's no sugar-coating in the Torah. It's not just about love, it's about the full range of emotions, and also what's left unsaid. It's such dark, fertile ground: so human."

Rabins is currently enjoying gigs in Central America, where she is touring as a musical ambassador of the U.S. as part of the Hoppin' John String Band. (The musical ambassadorship is a program of the State Department, administered by Jazz at Lincoln Center.) Loyal fans and devotees of great new music by Jewish women will have to wait for the *Girls in Trouble* CD, but luckily Rabins's music can be heard online on her website, her MySpace page and through Jdub.

MELANIE WEISS



Lilith's First-Ever Silent Auction

To help fund the redesign of its website, Lilith threw the non-profit organization's first-ever silent auction. The event, March 26 at Drisha in Manhattan, was a huge success, thanks to the generosity of donors far and wide. Many Lilith supporters not only attended the event, but — from across the country and the globe — provided an eclectic and truly Lilith-like selection of items, from sex toys to a Talmud class. (In covering the event, the bloggers at Young Manhattanite listed a few of the items — from a matrushka doll of Russian dictators to Hazon cyclist gear to a women-at-study tambourine — and commented that “when they say, ‘You’d never find a grouping of these items anywhere else,’ they mean it.”)

Watch for details of Lilith's next auction, and enjoy highlights from this event care of another Lilith first — check out our new channel on YouTube to see clips from the event, including some little-known facts about knishes. Want to learn more about the Lilith silent auction, or how to be involved in the future? (Our next auction is already scheduled for November 12. See page 43.) Email us at event@lilith.org.



“In moving beyond identity politics, feminism has subtly penetrated all corners of pop culture. I wouldn’t call that ‘death’; I’d call it evolution.”

Judy Berman, “Is feminism dead in pop culture?” on Salon’s Broadsheet blog, April 29, 2009

Alysa Stanton,
the first black female
rabbi, graduated
this May from
the Reform
movement’s
Hebrew Union
College.



When people ask her, “Were you born Jewish?” she replies, “Yes, but not from a Jewish womb.” Stanton, 45, who formally converted to Judaism in her 20s, had been a psychotherapist. She will begin her rabbinic career as part-time rabbi with Congregation Beth Shalom in Greenville, North Carolina. What will it be like for her to be a black woman rabbi in the South? “I think God has a sense of humor,” says Stanton. And she adds, “I am a rabbi who happens to be an African-American woman, not an African-American woman who happens to be a rabbi.”

Protection in Many Languages

Give credit to Jewish Women International of Canada (JWIC) for their polyglot inclusivity, reaching out to Jewish women by publishing two of its major publications in several languages. “Protect Yourself: Stop the Violence Against You,” a pamphlet for women escaping domestic abuse, printed in English, French, Hebrew, Spanish and Russian, has already been widely distributed to shelters, social workers and medical facilities. And the newest publication, “Why Do I Need a Jewish Divorce?” created in collaboration with the Canadian governmental project Family Law Education for Women, is already out in English, French and Russian, with editions in Hebrew, Spanish and Yiddish on the way. It explains many specifics of how getting — or not getting — a *get* can affect a family legally or in Jewish society. For more information or to order these valuable resources, go to www.jwi.org.

The Powder and The Glory

Small of stature, **Helena Rubinstein**, nee **Chaja Rubinstein** (4'10") and **Elizabeth Arden**, nee

Florence Nightingale Graham (5'2") pressed a long-lasting, red-rouged imprint into the 20th century and beyond. PBS's recent documentary "The Powder and the Glory" offered an intimate look at their personal and professional lives, and their lifelong rivalry. Rubinstein was a philanthropist, an art collector, and an early supporter of the State of Israel, where she founded the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of Contemporary Art. Arden, an Episcopalian, Canadian immigrant, was passionate about thoroughbred horses. Each woman's products were representative of the woman herself: a pink-clad Arden cultivated a feminine, elite clientele. The boldly dressed Rubinstein used her flair for the dramatic often, dropping small bottles of the "Heaven Scent" fragrance from the top of Bonwit Teller's Fifth Avenue store and using kohl to line the eyes of movie icon Theda Bara.

"The Powder and the Glory" includes an interview with the late **Kitty Carlisle Hart**, the tastefully made-up actress and philanthropist, who knew Arden from the race track and bought a painting from Rubinstein, and '60s model **Twiggy**, whose heavily-painted, come-hither eyelashes defined the sexual revolution of her generation. In the film, rare archival photographs and footage are interspersed with a narrative based on *War Paint*, a book detailing the lives of the two cosmetics titans, their times and their desire to best one another. It

contends that their rivalry was, in part, the fuel that pushed these larger-than-life women to their enormous successes.

The two, who never met or spoke although they lived and worked only blocks apart in New York City, were similar in many ways. Tough, shrewd and intuitive, they successfully re-created themselves and offered other women the tools to transform

their own images, convincing them that by using cosmetic products they could aspire to another kind of life. The cosmetics were, for these women and for many women after, not merely scented, smooth substances; they were their dreams.

These doyennes were born into a world where make-up was the province of ladies of ill repute, and therefore synony-

mous with sex. In World War I, as women were abandoning the ironing board and heading into the workplace, Rubinstein's and Arden's creams came out of the kitchen pots and into nicely packaged jars in the marketplace. Their creators legitimized a woman's desire to put her best face forward. And therein lies the power and the glory.

ANGELA HIMSEL



Ruth Messinger (l.), president and CEO of American Jewish World Service, presented the commencement address this year at the Jewish Theological Seminary, urging graduates to “step outside their comfort zones” and think globally in their Jewish pursuits. Also honored with a degree this year was **Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella** (r.), the first Jewish and female justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

In a powerful speech recently at Toronto's York University, Abella said “This is the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

And we just finished recognizing — I don't think ‘celebrating’ is quite appropriate — some of the most iconic global anniversaries in the modern era: the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Genocide Convention, and of the last of the Nuremberg Trials. As we walk towards our future, we need to remember what momentous global objec-

tives we had in mind then.... Unless we pay attention to intolerance, the world's fastest growth industry, we risk losing the civilizing sinews that flexed the world's muscles after World War II.”



Garden-Variety Judaism

Risa Strauss is program director of Toronto's Kavanah Garden, a Jewish, organic sub/urban community teaching garden. Located just outside the city, it offers hands-on experience using Jewish ecological and agricultural wisdom. Strauss is also involved in an emerging Jewish C.S.A. (community-sponsored agriculture) project (hence the pickles). For more information on the Kavanah Garden, check out www.torathateva.org.

Ethiopian Women's Empowerment

Thirty-two-year-old **Efrat Mekonan** has never fit into an predictable picture or story; that's part of why she is so determined to help other Ethiopian-Israelis who are struggling. Born in an isolated Jewish community in the Gondar region of Ethiopia, she lost both her parents before she turned eight, and at nine, walked for six months, her one-year-old niece on her back. After reaching a Sudanese transit camp she was airlifted to Israel and eventually settled in Beit Shemesh, a suburb of Jerusalem.

As new immigrants, Ethiopian-Israelis have often felt they face discrimination and lack adequate representation to address their concerns and needs. In 2005, Mekonan participated in a Community Empowerment program, funded by the Ethiopian National Project, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and the United Jewish Endowment Fund. Twenty-four participants learned how municipal leadership works and how to take action to ameliorate conditions for other Ethiopians in Beit Shemesh.

The vast divide between native Israelis and Ethiopian immigrants, convinced Mekonan that change is necessary. She decided to run in the municipal elections held last November. Unfortunately, the school where she teaches forbids teachers from entering a political race, so

Mekonan withdrew before the election, but she is determined to take advantage of any opportunity to act and advocate for those in need.

Another natural leader, 27-year-old **Pnina-Falego Gaday**, has used the Israeli university Hillel circuit as an outlet to “awaken interest among Ethiopian students” in their heritage and culture. Trekking to Sudan in 1984's Operation Moses to fulfill her mother's dream, Pnina is now living that dream, finding a place in Israeli society and excelling there. In 2007 she was appointed Hillel director at Tel Aviv University, a fitting choice after Pnina spearheaded many successful initiatives at Hebrew University Hillel, like Ethiopian Night and Guzo-Journey, “a year-long series of workshops and enrichment programs for Ethiopian-Israeli young people on campus.”

These programs encourage Ethiopian students to connect more deeply to their roots, while also rigorously pursuing their studies. Pnina does acknowledge distinct differences for Ethiopian-Israelis, even in the sort of Judaism they practice, but she also doesn't see this difference as a barrier. She has found a role in the Israeli community, and aims to give the same sense of inclusion and uniqueness to other young Ethiopians.

ELIZABETH LONDON

“In an attempt to bring individuals closer together, both literally and figuratively, the frame serves as our catalyst to inspire social interactions, while providing a space for contemplation and exploration.”

From the Project Connect website, by Pratt University students **Julie Cohen** and **Yagmur Uslu**. Looking for your own fun frame? Try a Lilith salon—a space to meet women like and unlike yourself! *Lilith.org*



When it comes to the State of Israel’s own official celebration ceremony, women are underrepresented among those honored, a study by the Israel Women’s Network finds...

“In a purely ceremonial task requiring no particular skill other than the ability to light a torch, including women in equal numbers and status to men sends a powerful message to all the young women, and men, watching. It says, women are as important to this country as men are; women love this country as much as men do; women were as essential to founding this State as men were. And making women secondary in this ceremony sends just the opposite message.”

Rebecca Honig Friedman, “Happy Yom Ha’atzmaut, to the Women, Too” on the Jewess blog, April 29, 2009

“She had no role models.
Gertrude Berg was the working
woman before feminism.”

Susan Stamberg of N.P.R., in the just released **Aviva Kempner** documentary film “Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg.” **Gertrude Berg**, who created and played Mrs. Goldberg in her wildly popular radio and television programs from the 1930s to the 1950s, is credited with introducing white-bread America to the experiences of immigrants and first-generation middle-class Jews living in New York City. *mollygoldbergfilm.org*



A decade after Lilith interns **Naomi Goodman** and **Susannah Jaffe** asked the company that manufactures the American Girl dolls why there was no Jewish doll, comes a response: **Rebecca Rubin**, living on the Lower East Side in 1914, a Jewish entry into the pantheon of historical dolls the company has marketed so successfully. Go to Lilith.org to read the excellent suggestions Naomi and Susannah made to the company way back then. You're in for a great treat!

The Performance of Living

The setting: An April fundraising gala at Lincoln Center. Above the stage hangs a sepia headshot of Anne Frank projected on a giant screen. 450 guests look on.

The action: An assemblage of black and Jewish teenage singers and musicians form a semicircle below the screen while down stage a young black woman performs a monologue from the Dutch girl's diary. The players then break into song, first a rap and then a Hebrew melody.

The audience: young and old, rich and poor, black, white, Asian, Latino, Jewish and everything in between. The girls and women sport floor-length gowns and cocktail dresses while the men are decked out in tuxedos and dapper dark suits. They are donors, volunteers, committed contributors and program participants in the All Stars Project, Inc., a non-profit organization that creates educational and performing arts activities for thousands of poor and minority young people in New York City, Newark, Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area (allstars.org).

The director: **Gabrielle Kurlander**, dressed in a lilac silk organza confection, presides over this unlikely performance as president and chief executive officer of the All Stars, which sponsors community and experimental theatre, provides leadership training and pursues volunteer initiatives that aim to build and strengthen this country's poorest communities.

Since Kurlander took the helm in 1990, the organization's annual budget has grown from \$200,000 to \$7 million, entirely from private funding sources. And while Kurlander undoubtedly has a way about her when it comes to raising money, she says she couldn't do it for just any group. "The All Stars brings development to poor kids and poor communities, and when you see that experience, when you are a part of that," Kurlander says "you are deeply inspired to do everything you can to expand it and to keep growing and to reach more and more people."

Kurlander joined the All Stars as a volunteer and budding political activist in the mid-1980s when she was pursuing an acting

career—and has been hooked ever since. Creating programs for underserved and overlooked people and neighborhoods is Kurlander's passion. "We live in a diverse and multifaceted society, but we just don't hear the variety of voices there are," Kurlander explains. The All Stars is mostly dedicated to poor and minority communities "because they've been left out, and not given opportunities to develop and grow and to have something to say."

The inspiration: At her Ithaca, N.Y. high school, Kurlander recalls seeing poor students who were teased and treated poorly by their wealthier classmates, something that has stayed with her. "I was outraged as a young person by how cruel people were," says

Kurlander. "I thought, there's something wrong with this. This isn't how the world should be."

At about the same time, Kurlander's mother, Judith Levy-Kurlander, a poet and political progressive, was touring synagogues and Jewish community centers in New York and New Jersey, performing a collection of monologues she had penned in the voices of biblical women who she felt hadn't had their fair say in the original text. She endowed Sarah, Rebecca, Ruth, Lot's wife and others with words to better express their circumstances. "I think she taught me something

about people who didn't have a voice," Kurlander says, "and what I've dedicated my life to is using performance to give people a voice."

Those many performances get staged in plays at All Stars headquarters on 42nd Street in Manhattan and at talent shows produced by young people in the poorest communities in the United States. They get staged in the corporate offices of Fortune 1000 firms where executives train young leaders to develop their professional "performances." They get staged at workshops that bring together black, Latino and Jewish youth and at community centers where New York City police officers and young black men do improvisational theater exercises and then improvise a conversation together.

ELIZABETH BENNETT



Christina Tapia, Shana Yadid, and Gavin Roberts (left to right) from the All Stars Project and the Ramaz School perform as part of "Together and Giving Back," an initiative building bridges between Jewish youth and youth of color.

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In Treatment

A noted feminist scholar tells us why this TV masterpiece pulls us in—and what gender has to do with our responses to the action in the therapist's office.

by ELAINE SHOWALTER

In my world, there are two kinds of people—those who don't watch the HBO series "In Treatment" and those who regard it as one of television's greatest works of art. This spring, each half-hour episode (there are five every week) concentrates on the therapy session between Dr. Paul Weston, played by Gabriel Byrne, and one of four patients. The fifth and final weekly episode shows Paul, a psychologist who is having his own emotional and vocational life-crisis, consulting his therapist, Dr. Gina Toll, played by Dianne Wiest.

Now, having seen the final episodes of season two at the end of May 2009, and understood its narrative arc, I've realized that "In Treatment" divides its audience in terms of gender. It's not that male viewers are less impressed by the program than female viewers; I have had a regular email exchange with my old friend Frank in Boston, who is perhaps even more stunned and moved by the performances of Gabriel Byrne, Alison Pill, Hope Davis, Aaron Shaw, John Mahoney, and Dianne Wiest than I am. But, as befits a series about Freudian psychotherapy, the concept, writing, construction, and acting of "In Treatment" are strongly marked by sexual codes, fantasies, and reversals which read differently for men and for women; and for me, those give the series much of its subtle originality and timeliness.

Readers of *Lilith* may already know that "In Treatment" is an American adaptation of a prize-winning Israeli television program, "B'Tipul," which aired in 2005. The original series was freighted with metaphors about Israeli issues of living with crisis in a society burdened by history and the struggle for survival. In the first HBO season, some Israeli political themes were translated into American terms. The Israeli *sabra* veteran, guilt-ridden over participating in a massacre in Lebanon,

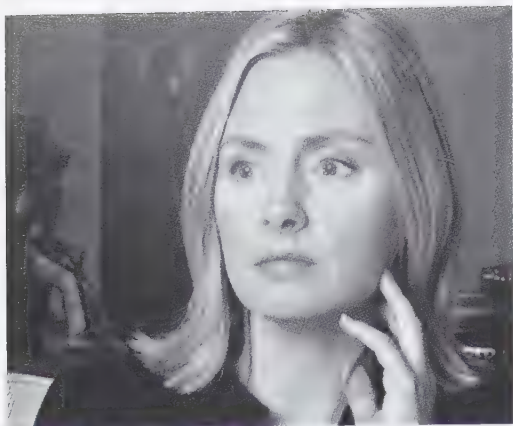
and his Holocaust-survivor father became the American fighter pilot who mistakenly bombed an Iraqi school and his fiercely patriotic and rigid father. Aficionados like myself, obsessed with details of background and adaptation, can listen to podcasts of a UCLA conference on the Israeli-American contexts at www.international.ucla.edu/israel/podcasts/be-tipul/index.asp.

But in season two, more personal and primal issues come to the fore: birth, facing illness and possible death, divorce and parenting, suicide versus painful self-renewal. In the original Israeli episodes, almost all the scripts were written by Israeli women, still credited in the American version: Yael Hedaya, Keren Margalit, Shiri Artzi, Daphne Levin. In the American series, the brilliant young playwright Sarah Treem ("A Feminine Ending") wrote the scripts for the case of "April," the most emotionally

As befits a series about Freudian psychotherapy, the concept, writing, construction, and acting of "In Treatment" are strongly marked by sexual codes, fantasies, and reversals which read differently for men and for women.

Gabriel Byrne and Dianne Wiest





The compelling television series "In Treatment" was not simply inspired by its Israeli forebear "B'Tipul" (literally, in treatment). In fact, the HBO version actually adapted many precise story lines from the Israeli series, created by Hagai Levi with Ori Sivan and Nir Bergman and using the talents of several women writers. Top: Hope Davis, who plays the fortysomething Mia in the second season of HBO's "In Treatment," a single lawyer grappling with not being a mother, and working through the tangles of her relationships with her own parents. Below: the actors who played characters from the Israeli original of the first season — a troubled teen, Ayala, played by Maya Miron, in conflict with her parents, and an angry couple, Michael and Orna, played by Alma Zack and Rami Heuberger, slogging their way through a gradually-more-enlightened separation.



wrenching of the sessions, in which a 23-year-old architecture student, shatteringly portrayed by Alison Pill, faces a diagnosis of cancer. The episodes with Paul and his therapist, Gina, were written by the playwright Marsha Norman (best known for "night, Mother"). All the writers are wonderful, but the unheralded presence of Treem and Norman makes this series the most significant television showcase for women's dramatic writing talents since Wendy Holtzman scripted "My So-Called Life."

Does it make a difference to have women writing the scripts? I think so. In psychiatric drama generally, according to the Freudian cultural template, the therapist is male and the patient is female. He is the father; she is the seductive, needy, hysterical daughter. Some of Paul's cases reflect that model, notably Laura (Melissa George) in season one and Mia (Hope Davis) in season two. Indeed, Mia accuses Paul of needing to have women patients on the couch who think they are in love with him. (A brief scene in another episode where he is counseling a lesbian couple offers a quiet refutation.) But Paul himself has a female therapist. According to a journal article by psychologist Lisa Gornick, we need a new master narrative for this version of the therapeutic dyad, one that "specifically addresses the relation-

ship of boys to their mothers and the quite different meanings of power and sexuality for men and women in our culture." The female therapist carries a heavy burden; she is desired as a woman, loved as the nurturing mother, and hated for her power.

Watching Paul acknowledge his multiple relationships with Gina complicates the otherwise familiar drama of the sexy male therapist. Marsha Norman's script follows every twist and nuance of their sessions, and Dianne Wiest's face and body language register all the impact of the transference and counter-transference she is professionally forbidden to articulate. It's possible to watch the series without these sessions, but I believe to do so is to miss the deeper metaphors about sexual combat and its persistence. As season two ends, Paul wants to break off therapy with Gina, and she tells him that, against usual practice, the door is no longer open. Already fans are petitioning HBO for season three; but I think we have reached closure. For these characters, this drama of treatment feels complete. ■

Elaine Showalter is professor emerita of English at Princeton University. Her most recent book is A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx (Knopf).



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HOW TO BRAID CHALLAH

by CLAUDIA REDER

i. Ingredients

You will be baking
with languages.
Russian, German,
and Yiddish
will suffice —
they contain
a large amount
of gluten —

ii. Mixing the Dough

While you
knead the concoction,
gathering strength
in your arms
and volume
in your voice —
such heated
discussions
until the children
scream, Stop arguing!
and you retort
we are not arguing
we are discussing
Aunt Ruthie
and your lost tooth
and Rachel's
report card
and Zena's last
doctor's appointment
for TMJ
slap slapping it down
turn turning it over
in the dough —
your conversations
rise, like special yeast —

and because
your temper
has risen
just a bit —
you might be in danger
of braiding
the challah
too tightly —
never mind.

iii. Cutting and Braiding

When cutting
the dough
into three, four, six
braids, they may be
too long for the
counter space.
Feel free to use the old-
fashioned mahogany
dining room table —
or linoleum —
whatever you've got
will do, Stretch
out the lengthy
ropes —
take up room —
English sentences
are famished
for intonation,
complexity,
and desire —

Using generous hand
motions, braid
the pogroms.

Don't forget to flour
the board every so often —
sweeping your hand
across the marble,
a clean slate.

iv. Optional

Brush with egg
white twice
so the loaves glisten —
once after
braiding
and again after baking

in honor
of your
Russian
grandmother
who threw two
kisses, one
for each cheek;

or sprinkle
a Yinglish
of raisins
or poppy seeds.

v. Serving the Challah

Invite oodles of people.
Tear off chunks.

Dance with your bread.

Let the crumbs
fall on the good table
cloth,
so be it.

Claudia M. Reder is the author of My Father & Miro and Other Poems.

ABOUT THE JUDGE

Poet Alicia Ostriker was the judge for the 2007 Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize at Lilith. She is the author of 11 books of poetry, her work has been translated into seven languages, and she has been nominated twice for the National Book Award.

ABOUT THE PRIZE

The poetry prize is named for Charlotte Newberger, whose support for Lilith makes possible the publication of new poems in every issue, reviews of books by established and emerging poets, and this annual poetry competition. Newberger has had a longstanding interest in poetry and the arts, and has served for many years on the boards of such institutions as Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater and The Poetry Center, as well as serving as president of the Foundation for the Jewish Culture.

You can read poems selected as runners-up this year at Lilith.org

2nd PLACE

EXODUS

by ONA GRITZ

A woman has painted her doorpost
 with blood so that now, in gray half light,
 she shakes a small shoulder,
 pats a curved back, and her children
 startle awake, allow themselves
 to be rushed into clothes.
 Trusting the hush, they quietly follow
 as she walks with their father,
 as they join a river of families
 coursing from home. They walk and walk,
 a block of bread dough on her back.
 She is used to waking early, used to
 hefting, carrying, hurrying tasks.
 Such is the life they steal away from;
 and she could almost feel light,
 listening to the sound of her children's
 feet beside her, breathing the baby's
 sour milk head resting on her chest.
 But she hears the cries of those
 other mothers, the ones waking now
 to the stiff unblinking bodies of their boys.
 Joined by a thousand voices,
 the wail rises, thicker than the dust
 they kick up as they walk.
Can we let ourselves be loved by such a god?
 She'd ask this of her husband
 but she knows what he would say.
 Adonai Echad. What choice do we have?

*Ona Gritz is a poet, children's author,
 and a columnist for the online journal
 Literary Mama.*

3rd PLACE

TAILOR TO THE KING

by EMILY SCHNEIDER

Great-great grandfather
 Was tailor to the King of Sweden
 The king kept his power
 in seams and pleats and
 Empty linings
 waiting for his words.
 The tailor invented, it seems,
 a phrase with thread,
 "By the cuffs of their trousers,
 You will know them."

By the cuffs of their trousers
 You will know which coins will
 touch in the bottoms
 of their pockets,
 And which pockets are linen,
 Which wool, which silk.

By the colors on their lapels,
 The signals sent by their buttons,
 Which leather, which copper,
 Which ageing gold.

Grandfather worked in the evening,
 Then gathered his needles in books
 And stacked his earth colored bolts of
 fabrics waiting for a soul to wear them.

His suits, everyone knew,
 Would walk with creases
 as even as the equator.
 As flat and honest
 as his fatherly iron.

When the king wore grandfather's suits,
 Even his majesty's shoes praised them,
 And his felt brimmed hats
 Sang down on them with joy.

*Emily Schneider is a poet and teacher who
 lives on Long Island.*

In the Civil War, Jews—Jewish women in particular—
unexpectedly found themselves on both sides of the conflict.

1862

In a Mississippi Saloon

fiction by DARA HORN

So it happened, one tired afternoon after their arrival, that Sergeant McAllister and the supposed Sergeant Samuels made their way toward town in search of a drink.

Jacob had not been looking forward to this. Their regiment, one of the last reinforcements to arrive, had been camped just outside of town, engaged in rather low-level work repairing some damaged railroad tracks and otherwise guarding the supply line, for almost two weeks before McAllister remembered his offer and felt guilty enough to fulfill it. He was apparently no more excited than Jacob about their little outing, but he was cheerful in his attempt to make a go of it. When he met Jacob on the main road toward town, Jacob saw he had brought Hoff with him, which to Jacob was a relief; it meant that he still wouldn't need to speak.

"Where to?" Hoff asked.

"I have an excellent destination for us," McAllister announced. "A tavern just down the road from the depot. I found it last night."

Hoff groaned. Like most of the others, he had spent the previous two weeks becoming a connoisseur of the local scene, and was already bored by it. "I'm sick of trying new places," Hoff said. "They're all the same. We already know the whiskey is best at Smith's."

"Ah, my friend," said McAllister, raising a finger, "but the best thing about this place isn't the whiskey."

"Then why bother?"

McAllister grinned. "The tavernkeeper there is a young lady," he said. "Not a bad-looking one, either."

"A lady tavernkeeper?" asked Hoff. "I don't believe it."

"Believe it," McAllister said. "Apparently it was her father's place until he died."

"Poor thing," Hoff said, with mock pity. "Surely she is in need of some masculine companionship."

"That's what I was hoping," McAllister said, with a theatrical sigh. "But she's a lady sphinx. Won't indulge anyone who can't solve her little riddles. Trust me, I tried. I thought it would only be honorable to give you both an opportunity to try as well."

They both glanced at Jacob, dutifully waiting until he shrugged.

"Capital idea," said Hoff. "At least I won't face much competition from the ghost."

McAllister led them about half a mile off the main road, on a dirt track leading toward a few houses just a short way from the center of town. It was November, and even though it was early afternoon, the day was already fading. The dirt track they were following was turning gray under the orange sky. Dead leaves swirled in little circles on the wind before them as they walked, crunching beneath their boots. Hoff and McAllister began talking about various adventures they had had with the local "ladies" while off duty in Memphis, but Jacob soon stopped listening. He looked up and saw a thin streak of cloud turn deep purple, a war wound gashing the sky. It reminded him of standing in the Hebrew cemetery in New Orleans, of seeing the sky change color over the trees just before he continued to the home of Harry Hyams. He forced the memory from his mind.

As they turned a corner on the road, Jacob saw a long wooden house emerge before them—or, rather, he saw what might have



"Exodus," from "Deez Nites Be All Da Same To Me," a traveling exhibition by Leslie Golomb and Lousie Silk.

been a house, if it hadn't been hidden behind a lawn of tall grass, with its roof and walls grown over with a tangle of brambles. It was as if the place had been abandoned years ago; the idea that living people still occupied it was enough to stir a hint of hesitation into his breath. Beneath its thick layer of thorns, the house might just as easily have been a cave, or the lair of some mysterious beast. As they approached, Jacob saw a weathered gray wooden sign hanging beside the open door. Though most of the paint had worn away, he could make out enough of the carved red letters to read what it had once clearly said: SOLOMON'S INN.

Inside the tavern, there was little to dispel his impression that it was more lair than room. The windows were few and small, and even though it was still late afternoon, candles had been lit, making the faces of the few patrons there gleam from below like hovering ghosts. The tables—about four or five long ones, plain planks with plain plank benches—were mostly occupied by officers much older than they were, along with a few old civilian men taking an early supper. Two boys were ferrying

food and drinks from the kitchen to the tables. The three of them entered and took seats at the bare wooden bar, the other side of which was occupied only by a rack of tin tankards hanging by their handles, a few shelves lined with bottles of mostly unlabeled liquor, and a well-stoked fire with an enormous pot dangling over it, a cast-iron cauldron steaming with something that smelled like cabbage soup.

"I see we have arrived in high society," Hoff sneered.

"Trust me just this once," McAllister whispered. At that moment, a young woman burst through a door behind the bar.

She was tall, just a few inches shorter than Jacob, with dark eyes and dark curly hair. She wore a plain black dress and a canvas apron that made her hips flare out, an effect that was soon obscured by the bar itself. Her neck was long and pale under her dark curls, one of which hung just above her eye, having escaped from the bonds of a red ribbon in her hair. Jacob watched as she stuck out her broad lower lip, puffing a stream of air expertly at the errant curl until it fluttered back behind her temple. She

glanced in Jacob's direction, and smiled. Her smile unnerved him. It was the first time a woman had smiled at him since the last time he saw Jeannie. He looked down at the counter, running a finger uneasily along a scar in the wood.

"Miss Abigail!" McAllister announced with a grin. "Do you remember me?"

Jacob glanced up again and watched as the woman's smile changed, becoming more ordinary, polite, dutiful. The curl fell back down over her eye; this time she pushed it back behind her ear with a pale, thin hand that she quickly retuned to her hip. Her dark eyes blinked, fluttering with either indulgence or annoyance,

"We don't spit at the patrons, Frank," she said. "Even when they deserve it."

or both. Though she was almost too thin, there was nonetheless something solid about her, as though she were a pillar in the room, rooted to the ground as she held up the sky. Another man might find her beautiful, he reflected. But as he watched her, an excruciating thought seeped into his consciousness, an eternal pollutant to his soul: no one in the world would ever again be Jeannie.

"Of course, Sergeant McAllister," she said. Her voice had a bit of a drawl, but a controlled one, perhaps because she was addressing three men in blue uniforms. "How could I forget about you?" Her eyes darted back to Jacob again. He once again avoided her glance, looking at his own hands as they rested on the bar. His wrists were thin and pale, bristling with blond hair. For some reason he could not name, he was afraid.

"This time I've brought some friends," he heard McAllister say. "This is Corporal Charles Huff, and this is Sergeant Jacob Samuels. Gentlemen, meet the proprietress."

"I'm Abigail," she said, and curtsied. "Charmed."

Jacob bowed to her quickly, allowing himself to stand up straight again for a better look. He watched her smile at him, letting the sound of her voice saying her name echo in his ears. Then he realized something, an impression he hadn't allowed himself to register when he saw the sign outside the door, and bowed to her again. As he straightened, he watched as she scanned his face and saw her thinking, puzzling. She was about to say something to him, but before she could bring out the words, McAllister slapped the bar.

"My colleagues and I would each like to ask the young lady if she might be inclined to go out for a promenade tomorrow afternoon, privately of course. But she says there's a riddle we need to solve first," he said, in his most charming voice. "Only the gentleman who knows the answer to the riddle gets to escort the young lady. Am I remembering that correctly, miss?"

Abigail smiled again, the dutiful smile this time. "Yes. And meanwhile, will it be whiskey all around?"

McAllister nodded eagerly as she took down three small tin cups from the rack behind her and began filling them. One of the two boys who had been serving the tables came up to the bar, moved around to the back, and stood on a stool behind it as he reached for something on a shelf. "Here, let me get it for you," Abigail said, and took down a bottle of brandy, passing it to the boy. The boy climbed down from the stool and paused at the bar, facing them. His head only came up to the young lady's chin. For an instant Jacob thought of the other children his age he had seen in recent months—Ellis, Rose, the boys throwing rocks in the streets of Holly Springs—and felt a surge of shame at the horrid world the adults were leaving behind. The boy's hair and eyes were dark like Abigail's, but his shoulders were stooped, and his face was locked in a sneer. His expression seemed oddly familiar to Jacob, though it took him a moment to place it. It was the way Harry Hyams's slave had glared at him when he arrived at the Hyams house in his stolen Rebel uniform: a look of unconditional, unparalleled contempt. To see it on the face of a child was nothing short of terrifying.

Jacob's companions failed to notice. "The young scion of the establishment, I presume?"

McAllister asked with a grin.

Abigail put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Yes, this is my brother Frank," she said.

Frank contemplated the three of them for a moment, eyeing their uniforms. Then rather suddenly, he razed his lips and spat, a drop of spittle landing on the bar just short of McAllister's hand. Jacob watched as McAllister turned bright red.

Abigail slapped the boy's arm, though the slap, like her smile, seemed more dutiful than meant. "We don't spit at the patrons, Frank," she said, then added, in a loud whisper, "even if they deserve it." She slapped him again as he departed with the bottle of brandy. "My apologies, gentleman," she said, in a tired voice that suggested this had happened before. "His father died at Shiloh."

Her father too, it would seem from her expression. Suddenly Jacob was ashamed of the sniggering conversation on the road about how the young lady had inherited the tavern. He thought of how McAllister had mentioned that the regiment had been at Shiloh; surely both McAllister and Hoff had both seen their friends killed there. Perhaps one of them had killed her father himself; who could know? But sentiment was a weakness now, as it always is among young men. If the word "Shiloh" evoked anything in either McAllister or Hoff, neither would let on. There was an uncomfortable pause as the three of them drank their whiskey, looking down into their tin cups as the young lady pulled a rag out of her apron and wiped the spittle off the bar.

After Abigail refilled their drinks, Hoff regained the confidence to speak. "So what's the riddle?" he asked. "I'm a certified genius, miss. If I can't answer it, no one can."

"I very much doubt that," she said, and glanced down at Jacob. Her eyes on him made him inexplicably nervous. He looked away.

McAllister raised a hand. "I know I gave the wrong answer last night. But may I try again?"

Abigail turned back to McAllister, and laughed. "You may try, but you've already lost."

"So what's the riddle?" Hoff called, banging a fist on the bar.

Abigail smiled. The three of them watched her, their attention rapt. "It's simple, really. Here it is: What is the opposite of meat?"

Jacob watched as Hoff frowned and McAllister smirked. But Jacob smiled to himself, a quiet, secret smile, and he gave himself permission to continue staring at the woman behind the bar. And then she saw him smiling, and knew.

"Don't guess vegetables," McAllister warned, waving a finger in the air at Jacob and Hoff. "I already tried that, and I paid a price. Now I'm going to guess bones." He turned to Abigail. "That's my new answer, miss. The opposite of meat is bones. Bare bones. Well?"

Abigail grinned. "I told you, you've already lost," she said. She glanced at Jacob, and paused. He picked up his cup and swallowed down the whiskey, peering at her as he drank. The air between them was electric. The other two men failed to notice.

"But am I right?" McAllister begged.

Abigail looked back at McAllister. Then she leaned on the bar on her elbows as she glazed in McAllister's face, close enough to kiss him. He smiled until she said, "No."

"Oh I am slain!" McAllister groaned, and threw himself on the bar in an absurd swoon, splashing out a few drops of whiskey in the process. "I am slain on the enemy's sword! Oh someone please bury my poor meatless bones!"

Hoff grinned. "Is it my turn yet?"

Jacob glanced down again, then looked back as Abigail planted her elbows back on the bar, inches from Hoff's face. "Yes, sir," she said flicking her hand against her forehead in a mock salute. "Your answer, Corporal Hoff?"

He leaned back, his grin even wider. "I see I've won already," he announced.

"If you're the winner, then what's the answer?" Abigail asked, her voice teasing the narrow gulf of air between their faces.

"It's very simple," Hoff said. "Feed."

"What?" McAllister asked. Like Jacob he was a city boy through and through.

"Cattle feed," Hoff said grinning. "Feed is what keeps bulls alive, and meat is a dead bull. So feed is the opposite of meat. See? I win!"

"Congratulations," Abigail said, and leaned even closer to him. For an instant, Hoff closed his eyes and leaned forward in a comic pose, as if waiting for a kiss. As a result, he didn't see her back away, turning to stir the pot behind her. "You have won the right to escort Sergeant McAllister around town tomorrow afternoon."

Hoff blinked his eyes, then gaped in genuine astonishment. After a moment, he recovered in order to collapse theatrically on the bar, but he was less grace-

ful than McAllister, and knocked his skull against the wooden counter. "Damn!" he yelped, then clutched his head with his hand. Apparently he had really hurt himself. "Pardon, miss." He grunted.

McAllister laughed out loud. "Fallen in the line of duty," he announced, placing his newly emptied cup on the top of Hoff's head. "The gentleman regrets that he had but one life to give for his country and his meat." He turned to Jacob. "Samuels, would you like to venture a guess?"

Hoff raised his head, pressing the heel of one hand against his temple.

"Miss, don't bother with him," he said, jerking his other thumb toward Jacob as he finally sat upright. "No one's every seen him open his mouth. The whole company calls him the ghost."

Abigail's lips spread into a slow smile. "This is Mississippi," she said. "Even the dead are entitled to their opinions." She turned to Jacob, and asked, "What is the opposite of meat?"

The candle on the bar between them lit her face and body from below. For an unimaginably precious instant, Jacob imagined Jeannie standing before him, risen from the dead, with a baby at her breast.

"Milk," he said.

"That's right," Abigail replied with a whisper. The possibility of someone actually answering her had been too remote to be real. Her hands had been fidgeting with the strings of her apron, and now they were still. When she looked up, the blood had drained from her cheeks. Her face was the color of chilled white milk.

Yona Zeldis McDonough, Lilith's fiction editor, asked Dara Horn what drew her to write about Jews in the Civil War, the subject of her rich and intriguing new novel.

In New Orleans in 2002, I came across an old Jewish cemetery. I was surprised to see graves there that dated to the early 1800s. When I read more about it, I discovered a wealth of information about Jewish communities during the Civil War in both the North and the South, which made me appreciate the real depth of the Jewish investment in America—in the land itself and more importantly in its values, especially as those values changed.

I was drawn to this material because of how polarized America has become in recent years, by how impossible it has become even to have a conversation with anyone about current events without knowing in advance what that person believes. So much of this rift goes back to the Civil War; when we talk about "blue states" and "red states," they often follow the Mason-Dixon line and its legacies. The enduring divide in American life ultimately wasn't about slavery, but rather between two sets of conflicting ideas about America's purpose: between a traditional belief in the ultimate importance of independence, family and property, and a radical belief in pursuing a social ideal at all costs. This same divide also exists in Jewish life. Most of Jewish law focuses on preserving tradition, family ties and property rights, but ethical monotheism itself is a radical concept expressed most vividly in the idealism of the Hebrew prophets.

In writing this story of Jewish spies during the Civil War, I found plenty of historical sources. I also discovered a community of people driven by loyalty to their country regardless of which side they lived on, but also driven by a rare empathy for the enemy. Because they were more often running businesses than running farms, Jewish Americans at the time tended to lead more mobile lives than their neighbors, and they were therefore more likely than other Americans to know people on the other side. By creating this story of spy versus spy, I was able to explore the tensions haunting not only them, but us as well—the enduring question of who deserves our devotion and why.

(For more of this interview with Dara Horn, go to Lilith.org.)

"No, not the ghost!" McAllister wailed.

"Miss, you can't waste your affections on him!" Hoff screeched. "He's a walking corpse!"

McAllister banged the counter with his fist. "And what kind of answer is that? *Milk*? Where's the sense in that?"

"Who says that milk is the opposite of meat?" Hoff whined. "Where is it written?"

Abigail smiled. "I shall be honored to meet you tomorrow in the square at one o'clock, Sergeant Samuels," she said to Jacob, and curtsied behind the bar.

"Of course," Jacob stammered. "The honor is mine." His voice sounded unfamiliar even to him.

"And you may escort your friends back to the barracks now," she added, gathering their empty cups and depositing them somewhere beneath the bar. "We will be closing in a few minutes."

"Closing?" Hoff gasped. "But it's Friday afternoon!"

Jacob turned slightly and saw the two boys gathering dishes and hurrying them back to the kitchen, collecting money from the tables. He almost laughed.

"Yes, it's Friday afternoon," Abigail said. "We shall be open again tomorrow night. If you would prefer not to return to the camp, I've heard the whiskey is good at Smith's."

McAllister groaned as he reached into his pockets, plunking a few coins onto the bar. Abigail took them, curtsied once more, and disappeared through the door behind her.

Outside, as they left the tavern, the sun had just dropped behind the trees. The sky was purple above them as they walked down the road away from Solomon's Inn. A quiet had descended from the branches on either side of the road, flowing down from the clouds and draining the world of worry and regret.

"How did you know that, Samuels?" McAllister asked at last. "Why is milk the opposite of meat?"

For a moment Jacob thought of trying to explain it—the biblical law against cooking a goat in its mother's milk, the extension of the law into never mixing milk and meat, the prohibition on consuming any meal that blended birth with death—but he saw that there was no point in trying; in the end it would have explained nothing at all. And at that moment he suspected that the law itself was nothing but a magic spell, inscribed into the tradition thousands of years ago for the sole purpose of being called up for duty on this Sabbath eve in Holly Springs Mississippi, to bring him face to face with a woman who could raise the dead.

"I suppose it's just my good luck," he replied.

"You bastard," McAllister said, and slapped his arm, hard enough to hurt.

"I say we go to Smith's," Hoff announced.

They did. But Jacob did not join them. Instead he sat down on a tree stump on the side of the road and stayed there for a long time, watching the sunlight disappear, taking the past week, the past month, the past year, and slipping them into the archive of life. When he returned to the camp that night, he fell asleep without raising his gun to his head. ■

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"Frontispiece," from "Deez Nites Be All Da Same To Me," a traveling exhibition by Leslie Golomb and Lousie Silk.



Hannah Sokolov—a young Jewish wife and mother transplanted by her husband from Brooklyn—meets the Watermans, a black couple who labor in the local fish store; she finds herself inexplicably drawn to Samuel and, as a result, to Belle as well.

1919

At the Connecticut Shore

fiction by JANE LAZARRE



Again, it is as if something between them happened before, but neither woman can remember it. There is something between them now, and they both know it, but neither one speaks of it. With all that going on—all the unsettling feelings moving around them, as if the air itself is saturated with something heavy, but without the shapes or colors that one of them might easily comprehend, or the words that might ease the other one in her mind—the two women stand for a moment, watching each other silently. Then they talk about hair.

“It’s thick—you can see. Not as thick as yours. And not kinky—is that the word? Not really curly. But wild, and I’d like it evened out. Can you do that?”

Belle sits on a chair on wheels, an old lawyer’s chair Samuel picked up at a junk yard and refinished for her so she could rest her feet from walking around the house. On this wonderful contraption, she can wheel around from fireplace to table and table to shelf when she needs something. On a lower chair, a soft green pillow at her back and a clean sheet around her to catch the falling hair, Hannah faces the fire. Behind her, Belle moves her chair to the left and right, holding the thick, wiry hair that hangs down past the white woman’s shoulders.

“It is thick,” she says, feeling it and spreading it out. She removes small, sharp scissors from the pocket of the long sweater she wears over her dress.

“Just an inch or two,” Hannah says. “My husband likes it long, but the ends need trimming.”

Belle lifts layers of the hair and pins them to the top of Hannah’s head. Then she snips a slightly curved line around the under layer left hanging loose. Slowly, layer by layer, ten times in all, she evens the edges and cuts the split ends of Hannah’s hair.

Meanwhile, Hannah has been looking at as much of the room as she can see without moving her head. She sees the wood, chopped and piled neatly to the side of the black iron chimney tools. She sees a dark shelf to the side of the fireplace and on it some pottery dishes in lovely blue and green flowered patterns, a series of tan mixing bowls, an earthenware jug filled with wooden

spoons. When she lifts her eyes she can see a shelf above the fireplace, and on it a black Bible and an old brown ledger.

Belle's eyes follow Hannah's. "Keep your head still," she says, a bit harshly, pushing it so that Hannah's eyes face the floor again.

A hand woven, woolen rug of dark red and brown covers a small portion of the wide wooden planks of the floor. A closed door leads to what must be another room, the bedroom. It's only a closed door, normal for daytime when a visitor is in the house, but Hannah feels it is closed against her in particular, that Samuel's wife Belle doesn't want her to see in.

When Belle finishes the back, she asks, "You want the front a bit shorter?" They both feel the absence of the Ma'am. It goes with the unspoken thing between them, the one they know about, and somehow refers as well to the thing they don't know about but feel.

"Just a tiny bit," Hannah tells her. "I don't want anything fancy, or noticeable. Maybe just so the front and sides curl a bit more when I pull the whole thing up in a bun or a braid."

Belle gets up from the chair and walks in front of Hannah, lifts her chin up in one of her hands, tilting her head in the right position. "Keep still," she says, and combs a thin layer of Hannah's hair down in front of her face. Through the veil of dark brown, Hannah can see the curves of the other woman's breasts stretching the black woolen sweater she wears over a heavy blue cotton dress. Under her breasts, her stomach has begun to protrude, a small round mountain beneath two smaller hills. Hannah wants to touch the mountain affectionately, as she might have touched May if she'd ever had a child, but she folds her hands in her lap. She sees Belle's slender, brown neck, and when her chin is lifted slightly higher by the firm hand that parts the veil and pushes each side behind an ear, she sees tiny silver earrings in the soft ear lobes, and she sees the other woman's hair. She's never seen a colored person's hair up close, but heard many stories about how ugly and coarse it is, how it's greasy, and it smells. The desire to touch it is nearly overpowering. Curls as tiny and tight as the tightest woolen shawl layer thickly, pulled back into two fat braids wound around each other at the nape of Belle's neck. Perhaps some kind of grease, or oil, has been used, because separated by a narrow part, the hair on top of Belle's head lies flat and thick and glistening until it meets the braid. The braid and the strands escaping from it look soft and pliant—the opposite of ugly or coarse. Hannah keeps her hands folded so they won't move of their own accord and reach out to touch that wonderful looking hair. Hair Samuel touches, she thinks, and shuts her eyes quickly, banishing the thought.

Belle has cut a neat line of hair from ear to ear at the level of Hannah's nose. Then she brushes it back in long, firm movements that bring Hannah's mother momentarily to mind, how each night Rena brushed her own hair, then May's, then Hannah's, tugging it into a braid that fell nearly to her waist. Finally, Belle twists

all the hair into a bun and makes a sound of completion, a humming sigh. As she pins the large roll high at the back of Hannah's head, the shortened front layers wave out of the pins slightly, and a few strands curl entirely free down the sides of Hannah's face. Belle holds a hand mirror up to show Hannah who utters a cry of pleasure. She loves the soft look framing her face, and as she touches the perfectly shaped bun, she knows she will not forget the feeling of Belle's fingers on her scalp, moving gently around her neck as she brushed and gathered the hair, combing the thick layers with her fingers as she pinned, brushing her cheeks, forehead and shoulders with a handkerchief she'd taken from her pocket when she was done.

Belle smiles at her, or at her handiwork, a broad, satisfied smile.

"The colors in this room," Hannah says, groping for words, wanting a connection she feels deprived of, despite the efficient, gentle hands, the careful brushing, the perfect cut. "I love the dark reds and browns next to the copper kettle. I love colors." She stands and reaches for her purse, one she's made herself, knitted in thick green and blue wool and lined with black cotton. "I made this." She holds the purse out to be seen. "I love shapes and colors so much I sometimes make up scenes in my mind that look better than the real world around me. My husband mocks me for it—I'm always changing our furniture around."

Belle is sweeping up the hair with a straw broom while the white woman talks. She tries to offer an mmm, hmm once or twice for the sake of politeness, but she wonders why white people always think you've got nothing to do but listen to their stories. And the time she hasn't got for white people is reduced even smaller in the case of this particular white person who is not only playing with the only human being in the world Belle loves but putting him in danger as well. Yet, her thoughts are interrupted by the memory of Samuel's words the night before, the knowledge that this particular white woman holds some interest for him, and despite herself, she understands how and why. She would never confess her own passionate relationship to stories, her stories made up of words not colors and designs, but she

Yona Zeldis McDonough asked Jane Lazarre why she rooted her new fiction in the personal relationships between Jews and blacks.

I was drawn to writing a novel that went back into the history of American slavery and racism by several forces in my life. First, I had been teaching African-American autobiographical traditions, from slavery to the present, for years. I have been deeply affected by this study, by the realities of American slavery, the details of which are so widely unknown. Secondly—perhaps primarily—I was lead to this study by the life experience of being a white woman married to a black man for many years, raising two black sons, a story and transformation in consciousness I wrote about in my memoir, Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness. I wanted to track the forms white blindness, and white privilege, as well as the various forms of white resistance to racism, have taken over the years, while also doing my small part to expose the actual brutality and inhumanity that was slavery in the United States. I believe deeply in the creative marriage between fiction and social/political exploration. The line often drawn between "politics" and "art" is, to me, a false and dangerous one.

From the beginning, I wanted to write, in part, about the history of "racial mixing" in America.

(For more of what Jane Lazarre told Lilith about this work, go to Lilith.org.)

stops sweeping and looks straight into the other woman's eyes. "I understand about shapes and colors and stories and scenes," she says. "That purse you made is real nice. It's a nice shape. The detail is fine," she adds, pointing to the tiny stitches at the edge.

Hannah opens the purse, shows Belle the black lining. It's a secret she would share only with someone who understands the importance of detail in things you make, even when it doesn't show. "It took me days to get the lining to fit just right," she says, and pulls out several coins which she gives Belle, who says, "Mmm, hmm, thank you," and puts the money into her pocket where the scissors have returned.

"We—our people I mean—we don't believe in tempting the evil eye by wishing luck for things that haven't happened yet—" Hannah looks at the curve of Belle's stomach pushing at the cloth. "But when it happens, I'll send over some of my fish stew as a sign of best wishes. We say mazel tov."

Hannah looks eagerly into the face she feels she knows from some place else. Or, perhaps it is not another time or place the face evokes, but a quality of sympathy Hannah has not known for years, has almost forgotten because the desire is so painful when it goes so long unfilled. Or maybe the desire is born into you, whether you ever knew it or not. Perhaps Belle has a face that communicates the special sympathy, or would if its color, several shades darker than Hannah's own, did not preclude its articulation. She can't get rid of the uncanny feeling that there is something between them, something besides the thing they both know is between them and would never speak about out loud. She stares at Belle whose opaque eyes enable Hannah to overcome her own fear of looking too long. She wishes she could penetrate the hardness of those eyes, find a way to make that mouth open in uninhibited laughter.

Belle meets her stare, but there is no smile when she says, "Well, thank you. We will appreciate the fish stew." Then, as if to compromise with her own harshness with this woman who is so appealing today yet was so offensive the last time they met, as if to remind her of her rudeness and thank for her generosity in one perfect phrase, "No shellfish though," she says.

Hannah blushes, reminded and chastened, respectful of Belle's courage and precision with words. She tries to answer with equal precision, perhaps some courage too. "Shellfish are forbidden," she says, looking straight into the other woman's eyes.

All the things she wants to say to Belle flood her mind. That she understands how prejudice can frighten and harden you. That being a woman is a blessing and a curse too. That creating scenes and arranging rooms, fixing clothes and purses and hair, making the world more shapely and comforting is the strongest happiness there is, that it somehow heals the sore parts, even if only temporarily, even if you don't know how it works. She wants to say something about the shaping, because she is coming to recognize Belle now and she feels Belle would understand. She wants to say that she understands being part of a people who have been in slavery so long they have to keep close guard of their carefully honed rituals, public and private, that remind them how hard and important it is to be free. She wants to say she understands how it feels to be hated for nothing, just for being who you are. But she senses vaguely, yet clearly enough to ensure her own reticence, that she is deeply ignorant of the extremities this other woman knows, that the tiny piece

of their history she's learned from Samuel is only the slender beginning of the story of brutality and unimaginable cruelty, cutting people to bits while they're still alive, slicing off body parts in public that should be too private and sacred to name except in the safest, most intimate places, selling children away from their mothers for profit, and all of it done in memory recent enough to be heard from their own parents' mouths. These are things Hannah had never imagined, still has trouble believing. And then there is the worse feeling. Hatred of Jews has always been a huge mystery to her; something undeniable and preposterous, because Jews are not only as good as others, they are better in many ways. She has always been told this. But the way white people feel about the colored has always seemed different to her. It is not exactly hatred, except for people like the Klan and those others who support them. It is more like Aaron said, thinking about Negroes as not really ordinary people like white people are—not only less beautiful and less smart, but with different feelings, not ordinary feelings like white people have. She looks at Belle hard as she removes her apron covered with Hannah's hair, straightens the chairs in the room. She tries to see her as a schvartza, the way she has been trained to see, not a person with a certain skin color but a creature who is her skin color, whose skin color determines what she thinks, or cannot think, how she feels, or does not feel, a creature very different from Hannah, or other Jews, or anyone white.

Facing Belle in her red and brown room, surrounded by kettles and pottery and a closed bedroom door, sitting in a wooden chair with a green pillow just where your back might hurt if it wasn't there, seeing the woman's hair and her ears and her breasts up close, and knowing a baby is inside her body that Samuel put there, Hannah is rocked again by the shifting feelings she's been subject to in the past few months of knowing these two. They seem less and less different from her in the way she assumed before. And more and more different from what she's always supposed. Belle has told her she understands stories and scenes, and the way she said shape and detail, as if she were holding up a mirror that reflected them both, told Hannah who she was.

"You let us know when the time comes," Hannah says as she covers her newly cut hair with her shawl. "And thank you. Working with the hair in layers is a wonderful idea."

Belle opens the door for her and stands on the wooden step. "Be careful," she says, pointing to a crack in the wood but hearing the echo of the words she had said to her husband, this time in a different tone, cold and distant to keep her heart from breaking. "Be careful, Mrs. Sokolov," she says, pronouncing the name just right, and Hannah hears all the layers of meaning in the words. She nods, then turns and walks away. After a few steps she turns back, perhaps to wave, perhaps only to look at Belle again, but the colored woman is already moving into the interior of her tiny house. Hannah glimpses the shelf over the fireplace with its dark ledger and Bible just before Belle shuts the door to number 20, and she proceeds down Knight Street toward home. ■

Jane Lazarre's works include the memoirs The Mother Knot; Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons; and Wet Earth and Dreams. *Her novels are* The Powers of Charlotte; Worlds Beyond My Control; and Some Place Quite Unknown. *This is from an unpublished work, Inheritance.*

FEMINIST FU



Reclaiming the ultimate ritual, visionary women are taking this ceremonial passage into their own hands.

by AMY STONE

FUNERALS

One of those rare days in June—blue sky, soft breeze, cool shade from the grand old buildings lining Manhattan's Upper West Side—it seemed every woman of a certain age walking up West End Avenue wearing a long flowered skirt and outrageous earrings was heading for Ellen Rafel's funeral.

Ellen Rafel died last June at the age of 63. A non-smoker, she defied death for two and a half years after being diagnosed with lung cancer. She had enough time to fight as hard as she could, and then have the last word on her own funeral.

Rafel was deeply Jewish, deeply spiritual, but not particularly observant. When she turned up at the Ma'yan Rosh Chodesh group at the JCC in Manhattan, her hair was lost to chemotherapy but in her signature mismatched earrings she still looked herself. When Rafel was first diagnosed, friends began to turn up at her apartment every Monday night to sing. By the week before she died, the folk singing for Ellen had grown into a chorus of 150, mostly women.

As her husband, Erwin Frankel, tells it, her funeral preparations were "part Jewish ritual, part feminist ritual, part Ellen's ritual." The traditional ritual purification—the washing of the body before burial known as *tahara*—was done not in a funeral parlor but at home by her sister, a niece, and a good friend. Defying tradition, she was buried in a red caftan and a selection of non-matching earrings, and for the traditional round-the-clock *shmira*—"the watching," in which someone sits with the body until the funeral—Rafel had designated six of her closest women friends.

The care Ellen Rafel took to prepare for her own death and funeral would perhaps seem strange in our death-denying culture where only gay men stricken with AIDS back when it was a death sentence planned their own funerals. But this still-taboo subject is beginning to open up for discussion.

Rafel's long-time friend Janice Rous, a founder of the Ma'yan Rosh Chodesh group, said, "We'd been through everything over the years except the death of one of our members. Feminism created an opening for people like Ellen to ask deep theological questions as a woman." Rous, who describes herself as "a lay spiritual leader," said Rafel fought for life. But "when there was nothing left of her physical life as she knew it, she had to surrender."

As women who shaped and were deeply shaped by the women's movement confront death, surrender may seem like turning feminism on its head. Letting go was not in the lexicon of living

life on our own terms, feeling we could change the world, defiantly letting it be known "I am woman, hear me roar."

Baby boomers are still very much part of America's youth culture, feeling that if we eat healthfully, drink a glass of red wine at dinner, exercise and find the right doctors, we can overcome aging. Death is not on the agenda. But as we get into our 50s and 60s, our concerns shift from egalitarian marriage ceremonies and baby-naming rituals to divorce, to the death of a parent, to realizing that we've become our parents and that we are now the elders.

In her essay "The Pink Tallit," Rabbi Elyse Goldstein writes, "A woman once said to me, 'If I never had a bat mitzvah and I never got married, the only ritual I'd have would be my funeral.' The Jewish feminist movement has filled the gaps in the life cycle, marking a wide variety of occasions."

But that may not be enough.

Death and mourning, this last piece of the life cycle, is finally being examined with a feminist consciousness. But most of the women involved see their experience as deeply personal, not part of an emerging shared consciousness. Often a daughter arranging a parent's care, a granddaughter writing a eulogy, a social worker counseling a family or a rabbi preparing to help bury one of her congregants thinks she is dealing with these issues personally and individually. Women looking at death and mourning through a feminist lens are not yet connecting the dots.

Unless they're Orthodox. For Orthodox Jewish feminists the issues are stunningly clear. Orthodox women still face an obstacle course in saying the mourner's kaddish in public, at the mercy of the male minyan as to whether their kaddish will be answered with an acknowledging "amen" (See pages 26 and 29).

REDISCOVERING THE BURIAL SOCIETY

Perhaps the most deeply intimate and rarely talked of aspect of Jewish burial is *tahara*, the ritual purification of the body before burial by the *chevra kadisha* ("Holy society"). Women wash women; men wash men.

If no men are available, women can wash men, but not vice-versa. Not surprisingly, the earliest known burial societies, starting in 16th century Prague, were men-only organizations where membership was coveted. For obvious reasons, women's auxiliaries were necessary, and men and women have long been equal members.

"In a chevra kadisha, no man is telling women what to do. Women have to be able to lift the body, turn the body, remove tubes as complete equals, not as second-class citizens," said David Zinner, executive director of Kavod v'Nichum. The organization's name means "honor and comfort"—two essential aspects of the chevra kadisha. The non-profit resource group, founded in 2001, appeals to Jews of all persuasions who want to restore traditional Jewish death and mourning practices. According to Zinner, women outnumbered men two to one at this year's North American Chevra Kadisha and Jewish Cemetery Conference in Berkeley in early June.

While the Orthodox have often held to the simple preparation for burial by a chevra kadisha, America's more assimilated Jews gave up the handling of the dead to the funeral home professionals. They were following "the American way of death," the title of Jessica Mitford's 1963 attack on the profit-driven American funeral industry.

Feminism's flowering in the 1960s and '70s coincided with those decades' distrust of the establishment. Now a new interest in the chevra kadisha may be starting to take back death from the funeral establishment. Even without Kavod v'Nichum, Jewishly knowledgeable women are finding their way to tahara.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a founder of *Ms.* magazine and long-time writer on issues feminist and Jewish, recently helped her sister, nephews and niece prepare her brother-in-law's body at home after the local chevra kadisha in Newton, Massachusetts, refused to do tahara because her brother-in-law wanted to be cremated.

Pogrebin went on the Internet and printed out the kaddish, in the Hebrew and its English transliteration. Family members modestly washed the body, then each lit a seven-day candle to mark the beginning of the shiva period. After Pogrebin led the family in reciting the kaddish, they all held hands and formed a circle around the body to say their goodbyes.

"Feminism gave me the courage to create meaningful alternative rituals that are rooted in our tradition but better address human needs," Pogrebin said. "I believe God accepted the holy intent and spiritual authenticity of our transgressive tahara ceremony even though the form was not quite right. I'd like all Jews who feel alienated or excluded from strict Orthodox practices to take it upon themselves to revisit death rituals with the same revolutionary bravery and transformational fervor that feminists applied to changing other traditions that excluded women of our community." When a well-known and prolific feminist writer such as Pogrebin finds her way into tahara, you can expect she will spread the word.

Without the rituals of death already on the feminist radar, Pogrebin probably did not know of singer-songwriter Debbie Friedman's response after her 92-year-old grandmother died in Palm Springs, California, in 1992. When Friedman phoned the local funeral home to ask about tahara and the response was not consolation but "That'll cost \$150," Friedman took matters into her own hands. The women who performed tahara with her were the rabbi who headed the chevra kadisha in St. Louis, the rabbi's partner, and, to Friedman's amazement, her own mother, whom

THE JEWISH WAY OF DEATH

Pre-dating ultra-Orthodox interpretations, the traditional Jewish funeral is simple, egalitarian, respectful toward the dead and wonderfully attuned psychologically to the needs of the living. A chevra kadisha washes the dead in the purification ritual of tahara, wraps the dead in simple shrouds, puts the body into a plain wooden box (in Israel there is no coffin), and watches over the deceased from death until burial. Burial is done as soon as possible. Traditionally, cremation is not permitted.

After the funeral service with its eulogy, family members or friends carry the casket, lowering it into the earth. Mourners shovel dirt to fill the grave. They then recite the burial kaddish.

After burial, concern shifts from the deceased to the living. Mourners sit shiva (literally, "seven") for a week; they light a seven-day candle, and a mourners' minyan is held in the home.

Mourning continues beyond shiva for a total of 30 days from the burial. Traditionally, kaddish is recited for 30 days for a spouse, a child or a sibling. For a parent, kaddish is traditionally recited for 11 months and one day by a son of the deceased. A tombstone is erected after shiva, generally within a year. While outside Orthodox Judaism all the elements of traditional mourning are available to women—delivering the eulogy, conducting the shiva services, saying kaddish—Orthodox women are among those who most passionately want to observe the traditions from which they have been barred.

As the editors of the JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance) booklet "The Orthodox Jewish Woman and Ritual: Options and Opportunities for Death & Mourning" put it: "It is hard to imagine a woman writing the far-ranging work that Leon Wieseltier authored on the kaddish, complete with scholarly notes on the purpose and content of the prayer. A book authored by a woman would be less concerned with the symbolism of the kaddish, and mainly occupied with the logistics of saying kaddish in different synagogues, and the relative degrees of hospitality and inhospitality afforded." While most Ashkenazi Orthodox rabbis now allow women the public role of giving a eulogy, many American Sephardic communities still discourage women from speaking at funerals.

“Jewish customs of mourning are deeply feminist, blending canon with creativity, the psychological with the legal.”

—Arlene Agus

she considers timid about death. (Friedman’s beloved “bubbe” is the elderly woman on the cover of her popular album “And You Shall Be a Blessing.”)

While her song based on the *Mi sheberach* prayer for healing has become a regular in many congregations, Friedman, 58, has not yet created music for prayers associated with death. She may be ready, saying, “How ironic. The only time there’s a specific prayer for women is when we’re dead—*El Maleh Rachamim*,” the traditional funeral chant. And the healing message of *Mi sheberach* could well be part of a final healing message that has nothing to do with recovery.

For women accustomed to worship where women and men share all ritual roles side by side, the separation of the sexes in the chevra kadisha can involve a feminist rethinking. Elisheva Urbas, a member of Manhattan’s Ansche Chesed synagogue chevra kadisha—one of only four non-Orthodox chevra kadishas in New York City—said, “It’s an interesting way to reclaim women’s spaces. There’s an element in gender separation that in this case kind of makes women free, a rare pleasure in a liberal community that, for good reason, doesn’t have a lot of gender-segregated religious spaces.”

For some women, Jewish feminist organizing has led directly to creating an egalitarian or “progressive” (i.e., non-Orthodox) chevra kadisha, where women are not bound by the requirements of Orthodox womanhood, such as observing kashrut and niddah, “the laws of family purity.”

Malke Frank, a co-founder of the Jewish Women’s Center of Pittsburgh, which introduced Rosh Chodesh observance, feminist seders and new rituals to an enthusiastic following, decided with a few other women to start a non-Orthodox chevra kadisha. They and the men in their chevra kadisha post the prayers and readings in Hebrew and English in the tahara room, enabling members not fluent in Hebrew to lead the team.

Frank, 66, said, “We see our mission not just to do taharat but to be an educational resource. Most Jews only find out about tahara when they’re sitting across from a funeral director.”

While some may consider the work of the chevra kadisha almost akin to a secret society, resources with a feminist consciousness are available on the Internet. The Pittsburgh chevra kadisha uses the Park Slope (Brooklyn) Jewish Center *Chevra Kadisha Taharah Manual*, compiled by Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips (<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/PSJCTaharahManual.pdf>). Drawing from Sephardic tradition, Sandler-Phillips includes songs and wordless niggunim to be sung throughout the ritual. Her translations are generally non-sexist.

Some chevra kadisha groups have formed in response to the needs of a single member. At Temple Beth El in northern

California’s coastal town of Eureka, when Devorah Davis Mann, one of the more traditional women in the congregation, was diagnosed with cancer, she let her final wishes be known. Rabbi Naomi Steinberg described taking on the challenge as “an intense feminist story—a group of women coming together to support her in her illness in her request for a traditional Jewish burial.” Steinberg said, “The women were motivated to organize, though it all seemed fairly abstract till we realized our friend wasn’t going to make it.” When Devorah Davis Mann died at

42, her body was the first to be cared for by the Beth El chevra kadisha. She was buried with her tallit and kippah.

Steinberg, 57, who co-teaches a class on women and religion at Humboldt State University, said, “Reclaiming the practice of tahara is an empowerment issue. Would this have come to pass without women rabbis—women taking initiative and leading in the custom of chevra kadisha? Do we put the body in the hands of a professional, who in the past has been a man? Or do we put it in our own hands? Handling the beloved dead is a profoundly empowering experience.”

The members bring a California consciousness to the mitzvah of honoring the dead. Nicole Barchilon Frank, who has led the Beth El chevra kadisha since its start a dozen years ago, is eloquent on the spiritual joys of tahara. If possible, the deceased are washed in their own backyards, with the birds and sky above, and buckets of water flowing “like a waterfall.” She has added her own ritual before returning to her family after caring for the dead: a mikvah dip in the Pacific Ocean. At 45, married with three children ranging from 12 to 24, she believes “whenever women are doing something powerful, it’s feminist.”

Comfortable with death, on her most recent birthday, she sent a letter to her family making clear how she wants to be buried. “I was a little nervous sending it out to everyone: ‘Here’s my birthday letter. It’s all about my death.’” She has no plans to leave any time soon; but she wants to make sure her wishes are clear. The letter gives loving instruction on the steps in performing tahara and the ongoing vigil from death to burial.

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

While tahara is still largely the domain of the Jewish funeral establishment, one aspect of honoring the dead—accessible to all, no training needed—remains strangely untouched by women. Pallbearing seems to stay in the male domain, though a return to Judaism’s traditional plain pine box may make the job seem less difficult.

Laura Geller, senior rabbi of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, has yet to succeed in encouraging change. “Even in a Reform synagogue, the family chooses men for pallbearers,” she said. “If I knew the woman and think there should be women pallbearers, the family still wants men pallbearers.”

But spontaneous change may be coming. Sherry Birnbaum, the social worker who directs Jewish programs at Westchester Jewish Community Services in White Plains, N.Y., described the funeral of a dear friend. On that snowy day she looked at the



Kaddish for Lilly, JOAN SNYDER, 1999.

"I made this painting for a woman named Lilly who was once a close friend of mine. She was a therapist, a great lover of opera, and a Holocaust survivor. Lilly was a very complex person who over the course of years antagonized almost everyone she knew. I made the painting for her because when she died I worried that no one had said Kaddish for her. And so this is Kaddish, for Lilly."

pallbearers—all men—and thought, "The women played such a caring role in the hospital. We can't not escort her out." And then, without a word, the women converged around the pallbearers, "like a color guard" of dear friends giving the deceased a final honor.

Geller has been more successful in moving congregants toward non-formulaic eulogies. In what may be revisionist food for thought, she believes serious study of *Eshet Hayil* (the "Woman of Valor" shabbat hymn that has become standard fare at many women's funerals) reveals not a role-bound woman but "quite a powerful image of a very strong woman engaged in the world." This positive view could be a generational shift; Geller, 59, says her own mother protested the hymn. Taking the sting out of *Eshet Hayil*, Geller said there are mystical interpretations of *Eshet Hayil* as the Shekhinah, the female aspect of God; another interpretation sees each verse relating to one of our women ancestors. "So I've changed my feeling."

Geller, whose congregation numbers some 1,000 families, sees a "feminist funeral as claiming our own personal stories. It's only not feminist if it's generic. The same is true for men. If you take seriously the unique story of a person's life, if well done it frames the Torah of that person's life in the Torah of tradition." Critical of books of generic eulogies, Geller said, "That's where feminism has made a difference—real women with real stories."

Even with Beverly Hills' proximity to Hollywood, Geller said that feminist stories have yet to appear in any of the videos made to honor the memory of women of the congregation. Jill Glasband, director of community outreach at Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, agrees. She has seen plenty of other changes since she married into the

Glasband mortuary business more than 30 years ago. Glasband, 65, the only woman to have served as president of the Jewish Funeral Directors Association (a subject worth examination unto itself), said she's starting to see families bring a woman's tallit for her to be buried in but has yet to see a consciously feminist funeral.

Glasband, whose cemetery is owned by Temple Israel of Hollywood, said she'll often suggest a woman rabbi, especially if the deceased is a woman.

TAKING ON KADDISH

As the baby boomers bury our parents, we may be ignorant of Jewish rituals other than the mourner's kaddish and the practice of sitting shiva. For grieving women, kaddish can be the great reminder that parts of Judaism remain a man's world. Ironically, although Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism hold no barriers to women saying kaddish, relatively few non-Orthodox go

through the complete kaddish cycle. And if they want to say kaddish daily for the traditional 11 months and a day, they may have to seek out a "shiva minyan" at an Orthodox shul. Attempting to be part of the minyan, they often find themselves not only vulnerable strangers in a strange land but unwelcome behind the mehitzah, the divider between women's and men's sections of the congregation.

Peeling away custom, Orthodox women have found that it is halakhically acceptable not to have a curtain dividing men from women at the mourners' minyan at home. They are also starting to have the courage to request that in a home minyan men make space for women's prayers outside the kitchen.

As Jewish women start giving thought to our own funerals, at least one has laid out a scenario for avoiding family conflict at the shiva minyan following her own death (may it be long in coming). Writer Nessa Rapoport, author of the 1994 collection of poems *A Woman's Book of Grieving*, said, with her deep belief in an egalitarian minyan, she foresees "double minyanim" at her shiva, one egalitarian and one Modern Orthodox. She explained, "I wouldn't want my family to be denied the comfort of their beliefs as Modern Orthodox Jews, but I couldn't bear that women not have aliyot, when I've devoted my life to halakhic equality. It was at the shiva for my beloved friend and teacher Rabbi Wolfe Kelman that I first saw this model enacted within one loving family."

For the daily kaddish minyan, the Orthodox world can be cruel to both unprepared and knowledgeable women. Esther Broner's *Mornings and Mourning* recounts her combative 11 months in 1987 saying kaddish for her father in a Manhattan neighborhood "kaddish synagogue."

On the rituals of birth and death, Broner, 81—whose 1993 memoir, *The Telling: The Story of a Group of Jewish Women Who Journey to Spirituality Through Community and Ceremony*, documented the creation of the first feminist seders—said, “I think we can lay claim to a lot. Women have traditionally been the birthers and the buryers—the two great occasions of our lives.” She wants lamentations to return to funeral rituals and can imagine a chorus of women tracing the deceased’s matrilineage—“not just bereaved women quietly weeping in the front rows of the funeral parlor.”

Broner explained, “It’s a painful thing but it has to do with taking public responsibility. It’s a womanly thing to do—a chorus.” And perhaps the same way that the feminist seders Broner and Letty Cottin Pogrebin and a small coterie of other feminist leaders launched 34 years ago paved the way for what is now commonplace in congregations around the globe, so will women’s new or re-purposed end-of-life rituals and ceremonies eventually enter the mainstream.

BIRTH OF A NEW RITUAL, BEYOND THE HALLMARK PLATITUDES



One of Jewish feminism’s great strengths has been doing the serious scholarly digging needed to breathe life into old rituals and develop new ones. Back in 1971, Arlene Agus brought to light the ancient women’s holiday of Rosh Chodesh, the monthly new moon celebration. Now in the final months of saying kaddish for her mother, Agus noted that “Jewish customs of mourning are deeply feminist in that they blend canon with creativity, the psychological with the legal. As such, they are unique among Jewish life cycle events. We’re starting with a very solid core.”

Agus, a Jewish education specialist at New York’s Jewish Child Care Association and on the faculty of Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning, spoke of the comfort and catharsis

KEEPING WOMEN BACK

In Jerusalem and other Israeli cities where the men controlling burial follow the “Jerusalem custom” barring women from public mourning, woe betide the woman who arrives at the funeral of a loved one expecting to approach the grave, let alone deliver a eulogy.

Stomping on the biblical tradition of women as the chosen official lamenters, some Israeli rabbis are literally shoving women away from funerals. And these men remain unrepentant when their non-halakhic behavior is challenged. “Satan dances in the cemetery while women attend funerals,” was the comment from the head of the Migdal HaEmek religious council after he blocked the microphone of a woman attempting to deliver a eulogy for her father this past March. The behavior and comments may be primitive, but now the Internet is carrying reports of the outrages worldwide.

In print and online, JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, is raising consciousness of this misogynist behavior. In the Summer 2008

JOFA Journal, Blu Greenberg, founder of JOFA, recounts how her cousin traveled 9,000 miles to Jerusalem to bury her mother, whom she had cared for the last months of her life. The chevra kadisha barred her from approaching the grave and she complied, not wanting “to make a fuss.” The more fearless female cousins “walked on without being stopped.”

Orthodox Israeli women are fighting back, but even an Israeli Supreme Court decision may not guarantee change. Back in 2003 in Petah Tikvah, Rivkah Lubitch, who heads the Center for Women’s Justice Haifa office, was barred from giving a eulogy at the funeral of her father, one of Israel’s leading social scientists. She and her mother sued the local chevra kadisha in Israel’s Supreme Court for violating human liberty, freedom of speech and religious freedom. Four years after the funeral, a panel of judges—two Jewish women and one Arab man—decided for the plaintiffs, ordering the Petach Tikvah chevra kadisha to allow women to give eulogies. She said, “No one knows about

these things until it happens to them.”

Even someone as halakhically knowledgeable as Blu Greenberg can be crushed by a seemingly authoritative rabbi. Poignantly, she writes of her gratitude toward the Jerusalem chevra kadisha for their loving care of her son JJ’s body after he was killed in Israel when a van hit his bicycle. But when she touched her son’s shoulder one last time, the chevra kadisha rabbi jumped in saying, “We don’t do that after tahara.” Even in this vulnerable moment, she wondered if the rabbi would have forbidden her husband, a man, from touching their son for a final time. Later, she found there was no halakhic basis for this denial.

When it comes to graveside participation and eulogies in Israel, advice based on experience is “Don’t wait to be invited. Just do it.” Jennifer Stern Breger, JOFA Journal editor, observed that “When you go ahead, they don’t do anything. But if you don’t anticipate problems in advance, you’re in a very vulnerable moment, and you do what people say.”

inherent in some of the traditions: “When you’ve accompanied someone you love to the borders of this world, parting at the dock is excruciating. Tradition allows you to follow them into the ground by positioning you on low stools for the week of shiva. During those seven days your visitors gradually lift you back into the land of the living.”

Agus, following the death of her mother after a decades-long illness, was stunned by a friend’s feelings of guilt after the friend’s mother died in a nursing home. When the woman tried to confess these feelings at shiva, the response was, as Agus put

The innovations Agus and Schulman have created are intimate, emotional and non-institutional. Within the Jewish establishment, many on the front lines dealing with end-of-life issues are women rabbis and social workers working for Jewish agencies, dealing with a part of life where, as Heidi Weiss put it, “Healing isn’t necessarily getting well again.”

Weiss, who coordinates the Pathways to Care program at Westchester Jewish Community Services, sees feminism as part of taking responsibility for your own life and death decisions. This includes signing a health care proxy, which in some—but not

At the traditional shiva minyan, Ruth Schulman, the grieving mother, looked up and said, “This just doesn’t help me at all. What I need is a circle of women.”

it, “Hallmark platitudes” like “Your mother was lucky to have you” and “You did everything you could”—leaving the daughter feeling even more isolated.

Looking again at Rosh Chodesh, Agus created a ritual of expiation for her guilt-ridden friend, centered on the traditional “Yom Kippur Katan,” an abbreviated Day of Atonement once observed before each month’s new moon celebration.

Agus explained, “It came upon me by accident, but turns out to meet a widespread need and, like Rosh Chodesh, Yom Kippur Katan can be marked during any month associated with the deceased, during the 11-month period of mourning or the *yahrzeit*.” She is in the early stages of composing and inviting contributions to the new expiating ritual. These might include: “Forgive me for not visiting often enough.” “Forgive me for devaluing your opinion.” “Forgive me for abusing my power as a healthy person.”

The ritual need not be limited to parental loss or to women, and it’s obviously filling a need. Agus said, “At a recent conference on women and prayer I kept hearing, ‘Oh my God, where do I sign up?’ So, yes. traditional Jewish modes of grieving are uniquely sensitive and profound, but there is a missing piece we are hoping to provide.”

Women coming together in rosh chodesh groups make them a natural successor to the CR—consciousness raising—groups of the early days of the Women’s Movement. The strength of women in a Rosh Chodesh setting has already been adapted in grief. Ruth Schulman of Princeton, N.J., spoke of the devastation she felt following the death of her daughter at 20 from a brain aneurism. When Schulman was sitting at the last shiva minyan, looking at the rows of chairs set up auditorium style, she felt, “This just doesn’t help me at all. What I need is a circle of women.”

She asked her friends if they could get together a circle of 10 or so women for the next Sunday. She remembered telling them, “I don’t know what you’ll do but I need to see a circle of the faces of women that mean so much to me.” That Rosh Chodesh circle is still meeting regularly 22 years later.

all—of the United States is the legal document in which you name a health care agent (a friend, a relative) who will carry out your medical wishes when you can no longer make our own medical decisions. In some states, it is the living will that makes these directives clear.

Weiss finds some women are surprised that they don’t have to name their husbands in their medical proxies. Others have observed that for some women, particularly older widows, this is their first opportunity to feel that they are agents of their own lives.

Weiss also encourages people to write “ethical wills,” putting their values down on paper for the next generation. She sees an ethical will as empowering a person to help shape how she wants to be remembered.

As feminism explores issues of death, women may start becoming more engaged in these areas where most would rather not go. Counterintuitively, as observed by Stephanie Garry, director of community relations at Manhattan’s nonprofit Plaza Jewish Community Chapel, “Women are so pro-active in so many areas, but not in this one.” Perhaps this discrepancy exists because men have been the ones traditionally approached to buy life insurance, to “settle their affairs,” to make sure that they have planned for their loved ones. All this has made death—or at least planning for its financial consequences—more familiar. Or, “perhaps men compartmentalize,” said Garry, whose institution offers programs to help with end-of-life decisions.

Stephanie Dickstein, a rabbi and social worker, works with a network of Jewish healing centers at the Shira Ruskay Center of the Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services in New York City. Dickstein, 51, describes books about caregiving as a “huge genre by women” and wonders if the encounter with Jewish mourning rituals will be the next subject for women. She’s not surprised that baby boomers don’t have death on their agenda since, she points out, even Moses fought God’s edict of death.

Ellen Rafel, buried in a red caftan after she lost her struggle to lung cancer, was “planning her funeral at the same time she was hoping to get better,” according to Susie Kessler. Kessler explained, “Part of the journey is the delicate balance—I’m going this way

and not that way. Often people have a sense of when the end is near, but there is a stretch of time when there is still hope and the possibility of a miracle."

Kessler was one of the early staff members of the National Center for Jewish Healing and a moving spirit of the Ma'yan Rosh Chodesh group. She now directs the JCC in Manhattan's Makom: The Center for Mindfulness. She routinely wades into the issue of fear.

As someone who has long been dealing with subjects that most people would rather avoid, Kessler may be pointing the way of bringing to the subject of death a women's consciousness: death as the other side of birth. "People used to be born at home and die at home," she said. Now with both birth and death handled by professionals, "we are so separated from the process. The result is fear. That's what's left in its place."

For Kessler, "the entire medical system is based on the premise that death is the ultimate failure." An alternative is the healing center approach to the seriously ill with spiritual support based on Jewish wisdom. "We are beginning to see creative ritual as part of passing from this world to the next," Kessler said. "And women are onto this ritual."

So is death the next feminist issue? "We're the gatekeepers for the entrance to life, housing something transitioning from non-life to life," Kessler said. "There's no guarantee that a woman can come through the birth process alive. It's a liminal space. No two ways about it. After giving birth you *bench* (pray) *Gomel* (the blessing said after surviving illness, childbirth, danger)." In fact, acknowledging this nexus of life and death, Jewish women would traditionally make their own shrouds during pregnancy.

"It's not that women are less frightened of death than men. We have a lot of ability to be present with creative ritual. We're stepping forward to find more ritual ways to accompany loves ones along that path without fear."

While the legalistic nitty gritty of end-of-life decisions may be something many of us have known about and ignored, once they're woven into a feminist framework they may become more of a challenge and less of a burden. But the exploration of ritual is what intrigues—discovering whatever happened to the biblical tradition of women as the highly esteemed mourners; elaborating on Esther Broner's vision of a chorus of women tracing the deceased's matrilineage; taking back Jewish funeral rituals from the hands of the professionals and making them our own. ...

Orthodox women clearly have their work cut out for them as they dig into the sources to justify their demands for equal participation in mourning the dead. For most of the rest of us,



ART OPENS THE CONVERSATION

When Susan Dessel was creating an art installation using shrouds, in 2003, she found it impossible to purchase one on the Internet. A kindly employee at the Manhattan non-profit Plaza Jewish Community Chapel came to Dessel's aid, giving her a "beautiful, beautiful linen shroud." That remnant from the installation "Untitled (The Ultimate Ensemble)" now hangs in her closet.

As an artist, she continues to mine material the public has yet to feel comfortable with. Last summer, her creation of bodies in death-like poses on a swath of sod rolled out at Long Beach Island (N.J.) Foundation of the Arts and Sciences created immediate revulsion. When members threatened to withdraw financial support, Dessel was told, "You can either come back and get the bodies or we can put up a wall." She went with the wall, and notes the irony of the public not wanting to see the work titled "Our Backyard: A Cautionary Tale."

Dessel, 63, said, "As baby boomers, whenever we hit another life phase, we talk about it—and death's time has come. Nobody talked about menopause. For our mothers and aunts, it was just grin and bear it. There are still things people don't talk about, especially relating to women. I think art really has an important role in the conversation. It gives people freedom to contemplate things they might not feel comfortable talking about yet."

Her series of large ceramic "remembrance stones" includes one for her mother, Lenore Hopp Dessel, who died at the age of 49. The shape refers to her mother's broad shoulders and big heart. The red top harks back to her mother's words every time Dessel bought a black dress: "The girl in the red dress has the most fun at the party." Dessel is currently working on "Still Lives," about women remembered on their tombstones in old New York only as "wife of" or "daughter of." The installation honors women in the first Jewish community that settled in Nieuw Amsterdam in 1654 and their female descendants. The show at New York City's Henry Street Settlement runs Oct. 1 through Nov. 7.

educating ourselves in what already exists in Jewish teachings on death and mourning is the next great challenge as we go where few baby boomers have gone before.

Returning to the universal experience of death, reexamining its Jewish rituals with a feminist consciousness, fearlessly rethinking what makes a good funeral may be the bravest new wave of Jewish feminism. ■

Amy Stone is a founding mother of Lilith magazine.

To read more, and to describe particularly satisfying funeral innovations you have developed or experienced, visit Lilith.org.



My Father's Reckless

Abandonment

by YONA ZELDIS McDONOUGH

My father died somewhere in Israel on October 18, 2008; I did not learn of his demise until the following February. His widow did not call or e-mail to tell me. Instead, I found out via the death registry webpage posted by the Social Security Administration, sitting in front of my computer in Brooklyn.

My mother, from whom he was long divorced, had received a terse, cryptic letter from the SSA regarding survivor benefits, so I went online to find out more. A brief search yielded the information I sought—or dreaded—or at least the stark outline of it: name, date of birth, social security number, date of death. I stared at the screen thinking that there had been a mistake, a clerical error of some kind. True, all the variables were in place. My father adopted an unusual spelling of his name, Chayym, the double “y” at its core as distinct and defining as a birthmark. Still I could not absorb the information. How could it be that

my father had been dead since the previous fall while I had been utterly unaware, oblivious to his passing? Wouldn't I have sensed something? Seen or felt a sign? This obliviousness of mine was especially galling. I had been deprived of so many years of my father's life; now I was deprived of his death as well.

I knew that my father and his second wife lived in an apartment in Ra'anana, near Tel Aviv. Had he died there or in a hospital? Suddenly, or after a long illness? What sort of day had it been? What birds chattered in the trees outside his window? Had the air seemed different somehow? The light? I tried to conjure the images and create the context, but both eluded me. I could not

understand my father's death any more than I could understand the apparent ease with which he assumed a new life, shucking off the old one—the one that included my brother and me—so effortlessly, like an unwanted sweater on the first warm day of spring.

He was born Hiram Zeldis in Buffalo, New York in 1927. His parents, Simon and Lillian, were divorced and remarried—to each other—several times. Sy owned a liquor store; his wife—inexplicably called Pip—was a large, loud woman who favored fuchsia lipstick and gardenia-laced perfume with a heavy, crushing scent. The family moved to Detroit, where my teenaged father joined

Habonim, a Zionist youth group; he met my mother there. After graduation, he spent two years at the University of Michigan—he won the Avery Hopwood award for poetry, a prize once given to W.H. Auden—but in 1948 dropped out of school to go to Israel. Pip could not fathom what urgency propelled her son toward a place filled only with, as she put it, “sand, shit and flies,” but my mother understood, and she followed him halfway around the world. They devoted mind, body and soul to the fledgling nation, living first on a kibbutz in the Negev, where my brother was born in 1952, and then on a moshav, a collective farm, where I was born five years later. My bookish father reinvented himself, tweaking his Hebrew name into a singular moniker with its own unique spelling; the intellectual, aspiring writer became a chaltz, a worker, who spent his days milking cows and his nights toting a gun during *shmeerat laylah*—night patrol.

But he grew restless, and in 1958, after nine years in Israel, he brought our family to back to America—to Brooklyn. He planned to take a novel-writing seminar at the New School, and so we would remain in the States for a year, two at the most. A year became three, five, ten. Israel, the place that had both called to and shaped him, was left behind. My brother, who was six when we returned, remembered the rough, punishing beauty of the desert, the air, the sky. I recalled nothing; Israel was instead a dream conjured by my father, a myth and fable, a place that was both central to my existence and yet had no concrete reality at all.

It didn't matter. My father was real enough to fill the gap. The bright sun around which our family revolved, he was witty, he was clever; he was smart, he was probing. He made us laugh and he made us think. He was a poet, a spinner of stories, an enchanter, a man of many quick and nimble words. No matter where he went, he carried in his breast pocket a sheet of 8½ by 11 typing paper, neatly folded into thirds. When—on one of our many walks through Prospect Park, the Botanic Gardens and the tree-lined streets of our sprawling, sleepy borough—I stopped to look in a store window or knelt to tie my shoe, I would turn back or look up to find him writing. One column at a time, he covered the sheet in his familiar, tidy print. Once a sheet was completed, he turned it over and repeated the process on the other side. Later, working at night or on weekends, he turned those sheets into typed pages. Nine to five was given over to the job that sustained us all: for 20 or so years, he was the publicity director of Women's American ORT, a Jewish philanthropic organization that established trade schools in Israel and elsewhere.

I can still see his desk in our apartment on Ocean Parkway, the compact green Olivetti portable typewriter in the center and everything else—stapler, Scotch tape, boxes of paper clips, rubber bands, the cup containing pens and pencils—arrayed around that sleek, über-modernist machine in a constellation of sublime order. When he sat at that desk, I felt that all was right in his world—and in mine.

My father made me feel cherished in ways both great and small. Most memorable, I think, was the way he listened, so closely, so attentively. It was an extraordinary thing, to be listened to so closely by an adult: thrilling, intoxicating, even seductive. I believed the rapport between us was so deep and essential that my being his daughter was its secondary, not

chief, feature. He would have chosen to know me—and to love me—no matter who I had been. I was aware of myself as lucky, as blessed. No one had a father like mine, and I never for a moment took him for granted.

And then, all at once, the privileged enchantment that was my girlhood ended.

There was a woman—isn't there always a woman?—and in 1974 he left my mother for her. Later, we learned that there had been many women; she was only one of a bevy. But she was different in one essential way; she stayed and he followed her, out of his marriage, and into theirs. She did not like me, this woman; she never had. She had been our neighbor in Brooklyn, and I remembered how she had tried to coerce me into inviting her sullen, whiny daughter—my classmate and occasional playmate—to my seventh birthday party. I wouldn't succumb, and I don't believe she ever forgot—or forgave. Ten years later, shortly after the wedding, she sat me down on the sofa in their new apartment on East 79th Street and declared, “I didn't marry your father for a good orgasm.” I still wish I'd had the presence of mind to reply, “Then why *did* you marry him?” But at 17 I lacked such self-possession, and instead

To have an adult listen to you so closely was thrilling, intoxicating, even seductive.

responded by overturning a very large and very full ashtray—I had only recently taken up smoking—onto the floor. I spent the next shame-soaked minutes extracting cigarette butts from her hideous white shag rug. She spoke against me to my father, and accused me of trying to undermine their union. But as appalling as I found her behavior, I do not blame her for what my father did. She might have aided and abetted, but she did not initiate. My father—ever single minded, ever stubborn—had gone ahead and done what he wanted to do, as he always had.

For years, I vainly tried to make sense of what had happened to him, to us. There were two ways I could understand his sudden and radical defection: Either I had committed some heinous crime, for which he was justly punishing me by withdrawing his love. Or else—and this was far worse—I had been fooled into believing that he had ever loved me at all. To think that

what I had treasured as true coin was only counterfeit threatened my very being; I felt the betrayal would unravel me, thread by excruciating thread. If I had sinned, there was at least the remote promise of expiation and forgiveness. But to accept that I had been, in effect, hoodwinked—extravagantly, royally, completely—into thinking he loved me made me doubt my ability to distinguish, ever again, love from a score of glib impostors.

In 1989, when my father and his wife moved back to Israel, he did not tell us; we found out only later, through old family friends. Without the Internet, finding him would have been difficult, though not impossible. Still, I didn't look, because his abandonment was such a calculated and powerful blow, one that left me stunned and reeling. He didn't wish to hear from me; that was clear. I would not go where I was so patently not wanted.

But although I never saw or spoke to him, I thought of him—with longing, with love, with rage, with sorrow—almost daily, for the next 20 years. When the Internet became as embedded in daily life as the telephone, I Googled him and found his website. There, for any and all to access, was a link that would have led me right to him. Sometimes, I clicked on the address and sat facing a blank page, the cursor pulsing like a small, frantic heart on the white screen. I moved to the subject

line. Remember me? I typed in and then deleted it. Fuck you was another possible, though ultimately rejected, alternative.

In the end, I never contacted him, not when my children were born, not when my first novel was published, not the year I turned 50 and he turned 80. I was too proud, too angry, too hurt. But, mostly, I was too afraid: afraid that the father I still loved despite all would say something so lacerating that I would never be able to recover. He was capable of such cruelty; I knew that that now. Knew it and recoiled from it in some instinctual way, like an animal seeking to protect itself from a hurt that is no less lethal for its incomprehensibility.

Then he died, so many thousands of miles away, in a place I had never seen and was unable even to properly imagine. Even in my mind, I could not span the gap between Brooklyn, where I now live, and Israel, the place he had chosen to die. Too wide, too far, too vast for any deathbed reconciliation or reunion of any kind. Instead, there was silence. But that silence was an active one; it listened, it waited, and yes, it secretly hoped. And that silence never stifled the inner voice. The words *I miss you* and *Why did you leave us?* may not have been spoken or written, but they were always there, hot and harsh in my mouth, where they will remain now, burning slowly, forever. ■

Yona Zeldis McDonough is the Fiction Editor of Lilith; her third novel, Breaking the Bank, will be out in September, 2009.

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REVIEWS

A New Group in the Big City

Twentysomethings in New York find their way(s)

In *A Fortunate Age*, the debut novel from **Joanna Smith Rakoff** (Scribner, \$26.00), six Oberlin graduates discover for themselves what twentysomethings have known for generations: life in New York can be filled with possibilities, adventures, hardships and heartbreak. An homage to Mary McCarthy's classic 1930s novel, *The Group*, Smith Rakoff's entertaining comic account tumbles through the lives of overeducated young Jews forging their familiar paths in late 1990s Brooklyn.

Beth, Sadie, Lil, Emily, Tal and Dave hail from the well-to-do suburbs of Jewish America; after graduating, each finds a path to New York and its worlds of theater, academia, publishing, and the dot-com explosion. Each of the six gets a chapter, in rotation, narrated by a voice both bitingly ironic and deeply sympathetic to the difficulties they each face: infidelity, unemployment, mental illness, to list just a few. This novel's humor is both its strength and its weakness: the characters' lives seem charmed, occasionally veering towards trite, but the very realness of these young adults, their ability to feel deeply and relate intimately, draws the reader in to their world of fantastic weddings and barroom accidents, recording studios and anarchist plots hatched in fancy high-rise apartments. Rakoff's writing has the most draw when she keeps up narrative momentum. One of the highly most memorable scenes involves Emily's spiraling into debt when her manic-depressive sister moves in: exhausted from working a second job, she shatters her foot with a beer keg, and a delirious hospital bed conversation leads to a marriage proposal from the cute attending doctor.

The nearly-unnoted fact of all six's Jewishness struck this reader as rather remarkable. These six best friends live in a world filled with secular and cultural Jews, with the novel's opening wedding scene setting the tone with a *chuppah* and traditional blessings. And these women grapple with questions of feminism perhaps more explicitly than with their Jewishness. "Some of their mothers—feminists, children of the 60's—had kept their own names, even if just professionally, which the girls thought dry and unromantic. They had all been thinking, separately, that when they got married (*if* they got married), they would do as Lil did and hyphenate, or turn their original family names into middle names." Several of the women in the novel make choices that their "feminist mothers" may not have made—to stay at home with children, to live in New York City—and Rakoff documents their angst and concerns with tenderness and wit.

SARA N. S. MEIROWITZ

After He Killed Himself

The author of The Upstairs Room tells the back-story of her adult life

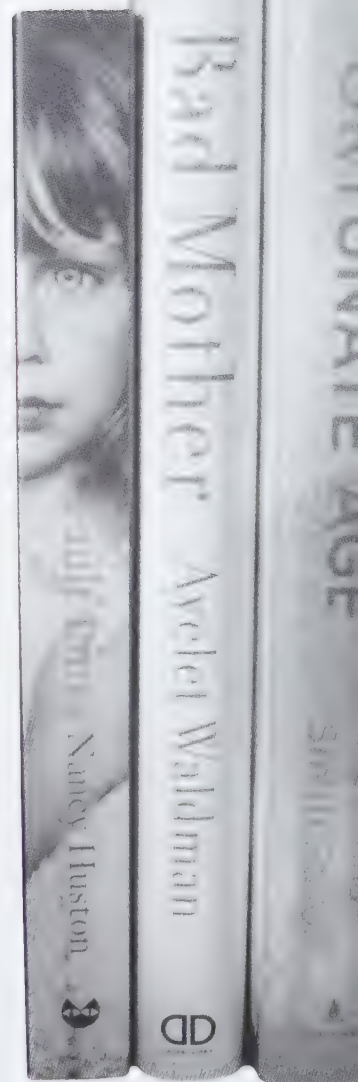
Anyone who has lost a loved one through suicide undoubtedly knows the excruciating pain and bafflement of trying to understand "Why?" But when, in August 1969, **Johanna Reiss**, author of *A Hidden Life* (Melville House, \$24.95), learned that her husband of 11 years had killed himself, her shock was exacerbated by the fact that she had believed, until then, that with her American husband and their two children she had succeeded in finding a happily-ever-after coda to her catastrophic childhood.

As a young Jewish girl in Nazi-occupied Holland, Reiss and her older sister had spent nearly three years in hiding, concealed in a rural farmhouse attic and looked after by family friends. She

described these and other terrors of her Holocaust experience in her now-classic memoir for young adults, *The Upstairs Room*, a Newberry Award winner when it was originally published in 1972.

What she did not reveal in that volume was that a cloud of adult loss had hung over her even as she had composed the memoir of her childhood. That is the subject of her new memoir. *A Hidden Life* is a meditative exploration of the ways in which, until now, she had kept the emotional wounds of her husband Jim's death hidden in a personal attic of her own making.

Paradoxically, it had been Jim—a seemingly optimistic American, deftly described by Reiss as "a Jew, although barely, a box of matzos at Passover time, that was it"—who had urged her to write about being a child hidden during the



Holocaust. It was he who had persuaded her to embark on a summer-long trip to Holland with their two daughters, then ages 7 and 9, to research and revisit her past in preparation for that project. And it was his suicide (he had returned to New York for work, while his wife and daughters remained in Holland) that cut the vacation abruptly short.

For years, Reiss confesses, she could not admit to anyone, including (perhaps especially) her children, that Jim's death was self-inflicted. Refusing to say the word "suicide" out loud, however, may have been less a form of denial than a practical strategy for remaining focused on the daily tasks required to rebuild yet another life for herself and construct a future for her children. Nor did that mean that she could hide from herself the cosmic irony that she, who had clung to life despite constant threats of death, had married a man who threw his life away.

In concise, evocative prose, Reiss writes about that decisive summer of 1969 as a season of multiple dislocations in time and place. Watching her young daughters frolic playfully at a Dutch beach early that summer, Reiss becomes aware of the absence of any comparable memories from her own childhood, which had proven so constricted that a brief glimpse of blue sky from a frosted window would be cherished. Later, news of Jim's death, awkwardly conveyed in a terse trans-Atlantic call, floods Reiss with more waves of intense yet chronologically disconnected remembrances, ranging from Jim's courtship to the unexplained pieces of his mother's psychiatric illness to bizarre incidents that, in retrospect, may have provided some clue to his behavior.

Or not; that is one of the infuriating legacies of suicide. Reiss's life demonstrates all too well another, perhaps even more infuriating truth: that living through past horror does not exempt one from the possibility of future calamity. Her plainspoken tone—no self-dramatizing complaints or whining—speaks to this hard-won knowledge, and in that unflinching recognition reside the seeds of her resilience.

DIANE COLE

Still Juggling

Do they worry this much about fatherhood?

***Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*, by Ayelet Waldman** (Doubleday, \$24.95) is an honest and humorous memoir of the author's motherhood journey.

When asked in an interview why she wrote her new book, Ayelet Waldman responds with a question: "Do you want the snarky answer or the real one?" The real answer is that so many mothers are suffering. The snarky one is that she wrote the book as a personal vendetta against those moms who sent her hate mail and accosted her on Oprah after she published a piece in the New York Times on loving her husband more than her kids.

There are indeed two books intertwined in "Bad Mother"—a real one, exceptionally honest and personal, reveal-

The snarky book rears its head when Waldman gets so caught up in her own life that she becomes a superficial observer. It is most evident in the chapter on marital relations, in which she attempts to tie bedroom bliss to the equal sharing of housework. Here, her brave and looming presence prevents her from addressing real issues. Feeling like a Bad Mother is terrible. Feeling, on top of that, like a Bad Wife tilts the scale toward despair. It is not only the men who want to "get laid," and the "beleaguered and frustrated" women will not jump gleefully into the sack at the sight of their husbands putting in a load of laundry. Relationships, and healthy sex lives, are dependent upon two fulfilled and confident, not to mention un-exhausted and financially stable, individuals. Sharing domestic responsibilities is a band-aid solution to the overarching paradox—successful mother, under-achieving individual, or successful individual, absent mother—in which many

Ayelet Waldman speaks truth to power. Ironically, that power is her mother's generation of feminists.

ing, through the soul-bearing of one mother, the shadowed, unspoken worlds of mothers everywhere, and a snarky one, in which the self-revelation feels more like self-celebration.

Waldman humorously and elegantly weaves her personal history into the book; in doing so she creates a resonant context for a particular generation of women, raised on *Free to be You and Me*. "That I was to have children," she writes, "was a given...but my career was to be paramount." Her frustrations, anxieties, and failures, spoken unapologetically, resonate, for she speaks truth to power. Ironically, that power is her mother's generation of feminists, whose daughters, now mothers, are "making serious professional compromises in order to be more available to [their] children or feeling like terrible mothers for having failed to make those sacrifices."

modern mothers find themselves. By remaining so focused on her own experience, and failing to explore its underlying causes, Waldman sometimes misses the bigger picture.

This book could have been called "Confessions of a Bad Mother." It is a personal work that touches on the profound rather than a profound work that manipulates the personal. Waldman crowns herself Queen Bad Mother while trying simultaneously to annihilate the category and expose the term as fraud. It's hard to take her seriously, though. There she is, publishing another book, raising four beautiful kids, having great sex with her husband, exchanging novels with her mother-in-law, going to yoga classes, and vacationing in Hawaii. That's a Good Mother if I ever saw one.

MAYA BERNSTEIN

WRITING THAT SHAPES ISRAEL'S PAST AND PRESENT

Savoring Words about Words

Language as intoxicant, and as home

Some of the very best writing can be about writing itself. Take, for example, the new anthology *Hebrew Writers on Writing* (Trinity University Press, \$24.95), edited by **Peter Cole**, noted poet, translator, and MacArthur Foundation Fellow. The pieces assembled here, translated by Cole and several others, enable the English-reading audience to make the acquaintance of both prominent and lesser-known Hebrew writers.

Cole's introduction presents one of the most elegant short surveys of the modern Hebrew revival. Cole makes clear the national and aesthetic crucible in which isolated early Hebrew writers found themselves; for them, Hebrew was "a kind of substitute homeland." Contemporary Hebrew writers, more diverse in both background and subject matter, and much more secure in their language's official national status, nevertheless raise aesthetic concerns that connect them to their literary forebears. Such a dynamic conversation across generations is precisely the editor's goal.

Cole has combed all manner of sources—interviews, diaries, poems, stories, essays, speeches, letters—in order to gather some of the finest voices of Hebrew literature of the past century. Ten women are included among the dozens of pieces, each contextualized with a brief biography. The poets Rahel, Esther Raab, and Lea Goldberg anchor the opening decades of the 20th century. Raab, the first native Israeli Hebrew poet, reveals that she was shaped not only by the thistles and thorns of her rustic upbringing, but also by the Arabic words and songs of her surroundings. Goldberg, on the other hand, describes the difficult predicament of being a translator when some in Israeli society resisted European cultural influences.

Among the more contemporary writers represented here, the poet Yona Wallach takes up feminism directly in an interview conducted shortly before her death in 1985. She claims that "[a] man can't reach that same sort of creation of life that a woman can," yet she also speaks more broadly to literature's need to connect to reality. In an implicit critique of early Hebrew literature's ideological objectives, Wallach declares that "[l]iterature should help us understand our lives" in a personal rather than national sense. The prose writer Ronit Matalon offers a personal musing about her imaginative process, and Shulamit Hareven—the Hebrew Language Academy's first woman member—also weighs in with a serious essay about the evolution of Hebrew. Demonstrating the collection's theme of advice-giving across the generations, pieces by the poets Zelda and Dahlia Ravikovitch address younger poets with wry wisdom. *Hebrew Writers'* final contributor is Haviva Pedaya, a religiously observant poet and scholar of mysticism who contemplates the threats posed to religious language.

The experience of reading *Hebrew Writers on Writing* can best be evoked through one of the quotes attributed to Devora Baron (1887-1956), the earliest woman writer cited in this anthology: "What is a good story? When you read it, you feel that you have to

linger a while after each and every clause, as with sipping a vintage wine, and when you finish reading, as when you finish drinking, you feel yourself slightly intoxicated." The extraordinary pieces in this book expose what Pedaya calls the state of "fear and trembling" felt by writers on the verge of sending words out into the world.

HANNAH S. PRESSMAN

Loving the Wrong Person

What this can teach you about yourself

"What does it mean to love someone who isn't there?" So asks Noa Weber, narrator of *The Confessions of Noa Weber* by **Gail Hareven** (Melville House, \$16.95), in her novel's sober recounting of unrequited love.

Noa is 47 and living in modern-day Jerusalem when she tells the story of her one-sided love affair with the Russian journalist Alek. "Me and my love for Alek—which against my better judgment I experience as transcendence. Me with my dybbuk—which is the only thing that gives me a sense of space," says Noa. She first meets Alek at the age of 17, at a leftist political gathering in his apartment, and in a sense Noa never leaves him or his apartment, where she remains long after he abandons her and their daughter.

Outwardly, Noa is the paradigm of the successful woman: a single mother who puts herself through law school, becomes a well-known activist and later the bestselling author of a series of feminist thrillers featuring the indomitable Nira Woolf. But secretly she is consumed with Alek. Although he eventually marries and starts a new family, he occasionally beckons her, and she rushes to him for trysts that she conceals from her daughter and her friends.

So is Noa Weber a feminist? An anti-feminist? A little of both? "I knew that Alek didn't love me.... And nevertheless I wanted something, I longed for something. To be significant in his eyes. To be important to him. To be woven into his heart in a way that could never be unraveled," says Noa.

This begs the question of why—for almost 30 years—a smart woman would "love something [she should] have loathed, and [not] love what was worthy of being loved enough?" The answer, it seems, is that Noa has no choice. Her love for Alek surpasses reason or understanding. Not surprisingly, such complete and utter abdication of self for a man who perpetually abandons Noa is difficult even for the reader to endure. Saving *Confessions*, however, is Hareven's cool, graceful prose, carefully preserved in Dalya Bilu's translation.

The novel is set in Israel, where "however far you went you'd end up meeting someone who knew your cousin's cousin," a place where wars are a part of the landscape and where politics seeps into everyone's daily life.

Hareven is a well-known author and journalist in Israel, and the daughter of canonical Israeli author Shulamit Hareven. Her short fiction was recently published in *The New Yorker*, and *Confessions*, the winner of the prestigious Sapir Prize for Literature, is her first

book to be translated into English. The novel's Hebrew title is, "He whom my soul loves," a verse taken from the Song of Songs—perhaps a more apt title, as it speaks to Noa's total devotion to a love is larger than herself. As Noa says, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. And perhaps it is not him whom my soul loves that I am seeking, but simply my soul."

ABIGAIL PICKUS

Harvesting Stones

A hundred years ago in the Land of Israel...

Traveling today to Rosh Pina, a city in northern Israel with a world-class spa, an art colony, and winding picturesque roads, it is hard to imagine the terrain when Fania Mandelstam, 16, arrives at the end of the nineteenth century. **Shulamit Lapid**, in *Valley of Strength* (Toby Press, \$24.95), vividly portrays the hardships and political struggles of the early Zionist pioneers in this 1982 classic Israeli novel, newly translated by Philip Simpson.

Fania, a beautiful, cultured girl from a respected Russian family, saw her world overturned in a pogrom; her parents were murdered and she was raped. She comes to Palestine accompanied by her uncle, her unwanted baby Tamara (the result of the rape) and her deranged brother Lulik, a victim of his experiences in the Russian army. They have come, at Fania's urging, to fulfill her intellectual father's dream of rebuilding the land. Her uncle has arranged a marriage for her to Yehiel Silas, a 26-year-old widower with two children. Fania asks her new husband about the place he is taking her, Gai Oni. "At the moment we are harvesting stones and weeds," he announces.

In Gai Oni, disease, hunger and death are constants. Like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, Fania declares that she will not go hungry again. And so this middle-class educated and cultured young woman learns to work in the fields pulling rocks, become a mother to Yehiel's children, cook and clean and tend to the animals. She exchanges her Russian dress for Bedouin robes and rides through Arab land to deal in commerce, politics and even defense.

Yehiel, a Sephardi native of Safed, is at home with his Arab neighbors, and fiercely opposes any charitable help from philanthropists. Fania negotiates with big donors Rothschild and Hirsch and saves the family from starvation.

In this carefully researched book, often taught in Israeli high schools, Lapid describes the Zionist era of the 1880s, and the rival groups of the yishuv, such as the BILU, secular Russian Jewish idealists aspiring to settle and redeem Eretz Yisrael and re-establishing the Jewish State, the Templars (German Christians to whom many Jews sold their land and became tenants), and the religious Jews of Safed, who throw stones at Fania. The idealism of Yehiel, who literally cleared the land with his blood, and the determination and resourcefulness of Fania are emblematic of that era of Zionist struggle.

MOLLY ABRAMOWITZ

An Erudite Adventure

A psychoanalytic approach to the Bible brings insight and consolation

The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious by **Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg** (Schocken Books, \$27.95) presents 12 Bible stories and rabbinic elaborations of those stories from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Zornberg's method resembles collage-making more closely than conventional critical argumentation: She juxtaposes texts from medieval midrash, Hasidic commentaries from centuries later, contemporary philosophy, and poetry—typically beautiful and profound snatches of texts—that (magically, "before your very eyes") re-create the Biblical original, in each case, as a profound expression of psychic life, a case study of humanity's struggle to sustain relationship with God, (a divided) self, and others. The effect in each chapter is one of tumbling citations, a humble display of quoted erudition. The art of these readings, like that of collage-making or quilting, resides in the unique coherence of the final assemblage.

In the concluding pages of her representation of the Book of Esther, for example, Zornberg summarizes her reading of the midrash as situating Esther "on the cusp of changing time." Reminding us of Jose Ortega y Gasset's comparison of true living to the feeling of shipwreck, that is, a sincere search for the genuine idea to which to cling, Zornberg glosses Maharal's appreciation of Esther as "the realization that the human being is... lacking, incomplete." To this shipwrecked, incomplete self Zornberg brings Kierkegaard's conviction that dread inevitably tends towards faith and William James' observation that in the spiritual process, "something must give way, a native hardness must... liquefy." This chapter, which opens and ends with Yeats' "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," includes Professor David Weiss Halivni's recollection of prayer in a concentration camp, Kafka's futile couriers, rabbinic apprehensions of Esther's desperate prayers, and J. M. Coetzee's assertion that

“other voices” speak through “cracks and chinks in our lives.” At last, we appreciate the psychology of a tradition that treats Esther as a final prophet, who, “in the twilight of prophecy” in an anarchic

Avivah Zornberg shows how psychoanalysis and theology share a healing purpose.

world, “falls back inside herself” into the “unknowable future,” where, possibly, “is the chink through which another voice may be heard.”

Although Zornberg describes her readings as a study of the rabbinic unconscious, I would tentatively call this work “psychoanalytic theology.” The mutually resistant ideologies of psychoanalysis and theology are revealed to share methodology and healing purpose; the compelling explanatory power of these faith systems is associative, and both strive towards truth. On the one hand, the psyche (like the timeless Jewish cosmos in which souls from every generation were at Sinai, and like Zornberg’s reading strategy) has no respect for linear, chronological time; on the other hand, psychoanalysis, Judaism, and Zornberg have in common a profoundly moving respect for the accrual of loss in human experience, our shared fragility, and that resilience that is born of exchanging words.

The Murmuring Deep begins with the surmise that if Adam was “placed in Eden,” he must have begun somewhere else. God “seduces” humanity into the Garden, activating desire, and thereby awakening us to a want in the self that seeks fulfillment. The book concludes with Ruth’s story as a lesson in rejoicing in “the gap” and the animating “silence” of discontinuity, like that space between grandparent and grandchild, in which we can find love, Torah, and “Torah’s teacher.”

Avivah Zornberg has a kind of fan club, a mixed multitude of students who follow her classes when in Jerusalem or when she is on lecture tour, and devoted (re)readers of her first two books, the

chapters of which take us through, systematically, Genesis and Exodus, according to the “parasha” divisions of Torah. Devotees will recognize many moments in this new book and delight in discover-

ing how they create new illuminations. Zornberg’s work is worth expending the effort it takes to read her. The trusting reader is rewarded with that deeper, more vivid experience of life that comes from confronting the existential, traumatized self and from finding consolation in Torah’s prolific, elusive meanings.

LORI HOPE LEFKOVITZ

Hebrew Poems, in English

Individual voices break through the collective.

Poets on the Edge: An Anthology of Contemporary Hebrew Poetry selected and translated by **Tsipi Keller** (SUNY Press, \$24.95) takes its readers on a journey to a far away land, an Israel that is at once familiar and foreign. As a whole, the poems presented in this anthology reveal their 27 writers’ aspirations, conflicts and nightmares: from Holocaust memories, which haunt both those who physically experienced it and those who did not, to questions of sexuality and gender, to Middle East politics

The book allows English readers to view Israel through the Hebrew poets’ lens. Keller’s short biographical introductions to each poet are also informative and collectively give an idea of the varied backgrounds of people who write poetry in Israel. But the title itself is too broad: according to Keller, the word “contemporary” refers to five decades. There is no clear demarcation of when an individual poem was written or from what collection it was taken. Additionally, the logic behind the translator’s selections is ambiguous.

Keller’s goal is to showcase “those poets who best represent the variety and richness of contemporary Hebrew Poetry,” but some of the selections seem arbitrary. Although Yehuda Amichai, Nathan Zach and Dahlia Ravikovitz, the pillars of Israeli poetry, are present, Keller offers us none of their formative works, the poems that revolutionized Hebrew literature in the 1950s. It was Zach and Amichai who introduced understatement to Hebrew poetry. Favoring the voice of the individual, they rejected their predecessors’ high diction and focus on the collective. Neither Aminadav Dykman’s introduction nor the translator’s short preface address this issue.

Other canonic poets like David Avidan, Dan Pagis, Meir Wieseltier and Yona Wallach are represented, as well as eminent figures such as Nurit Zarhi, Agi Mishol, Maya Bejerano and Roni Someck, who together weave the Israeli literary fabric. Only a handful of Keller’s anthologized poets could be dubbed “marginal.”

As for the translations themselves, Keller succeeded in transmitting many poems artfully. Agi Mishol’s “Nocturnal I,” for example, preserves its melancholic rhythms in English:

In the house / all is contained: / the sugar in the jar / the bread in the bread-box / the knife in the drawer / the food in the pot / the evil spirits / in the folds of the drapes.

This accuracy and lightness of sound, however, are absent in some of the translations, where Keller favors rare synonyms and renders the elegant Hebrew a clumsy or even incorrect equivalent. Someck’s simple “underpants” become “lingerie,” and Keller turns “circumstances” (*nessibot*) into “reasons” in the closing of a political poem by Ravikovitch.

Finally, as poetry is never really translatable, I prefer bilingual editions that allow readers with some knowledge of Hebrew to wrestle with the text while being aided by translations. *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity* (1999) and *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (2006) give models to be emulated. Keller’s decision (or her editor’s) to present the translations alone

might be economical, but it might also reflect a philosophy according to which a translated poem ought to become a poem in its own right. To a certain extent, Keller succeeded in creating a mass of English poems, which cumulatively may be appreciated on their own, carrying their readers to distant landscapes of the mind.

NILI GOLD

Lovers' Road Trip

High-end talk and travel, lots of each

The Scenic Route by **Binnie Kirshenbaum** (Harper Perennial, \$13.99) is a road trip through Europe and through Sylvia Landsman's life. It is testament to Kirshenbaum's skills and insights that an avid traveler finds the latter more interesting.

Landsman, on the surface, fits a type: Jewish, middle-aged, divorced and recently unemployed. Beneath the surface, she is a cacophony of eccentricities whose barbaric yawp only becomes audible when she meets Henry, a fellow traveler, under E. M. Forster-esque conditions in Italy. Henry is the perfect Southern gentleman, travel companion and lover, but for the fact that he is married—trapped of his own volition in a loveless marriage which bankrolls his decadent, Grand Tour lifestyle.

Sylvia hops easily into his bed (and, subsequently, his car) and joins him for months of tooling around the European countryside, with stops in picturesque cities and vil-

lages along the way. To pass the time while driving, she tells him stories of her family, her life, and, at the end of the day, herself.

Her anecdotes, charming and amusing, sometimes wander too far off course, but that may be the point. Perhaps this is one of the perils of being, as Kirshenbaum clearly is, clever. At one point Henry ventures, "Pleasure is the finest of pursuits." Sylvia counters with, "Define pleasure." Leading us to:

And Henry said, "Right this very minute," but because of that way that he had, of not always emphasizing one syllable over another, I didn't know if he meant "right this very minute" was his definition of *pleasure*, or was he asking did I want his definition of *pleasure* "right this very minute," as if maybe I'd put him on the spot, like when someone asks who is your favorite author, and you go blank; or if you want to turn off grandpa's life support, and you need some time to think that through.

These snarls of thought lead the reader into Sylvia's mental cul de sacs and chasm-gripping highways. In theory they lead Henry there as well, though the reader of this novel may feel more present than Henry. But that stands to reason: Sylvia cannot understand someone like Henry, who has chosen to opt out of true human feeling and connection. Perhaps she can't understand because she doesn't want to. Part of the story she tells involves her once-close

friend Ruby, and Sylvia's omission—one could argue an "opting out"—which led to the fatal collapse of their friendship.

When Henry's wife finishes her session with her yogi in India early, Henry and Sylvia are faced with a crossroads in their journey. Kirshenbaum has crafted a strikingly poignant conclusion, well worth every meandering path and unexpected detour it takes to get there.

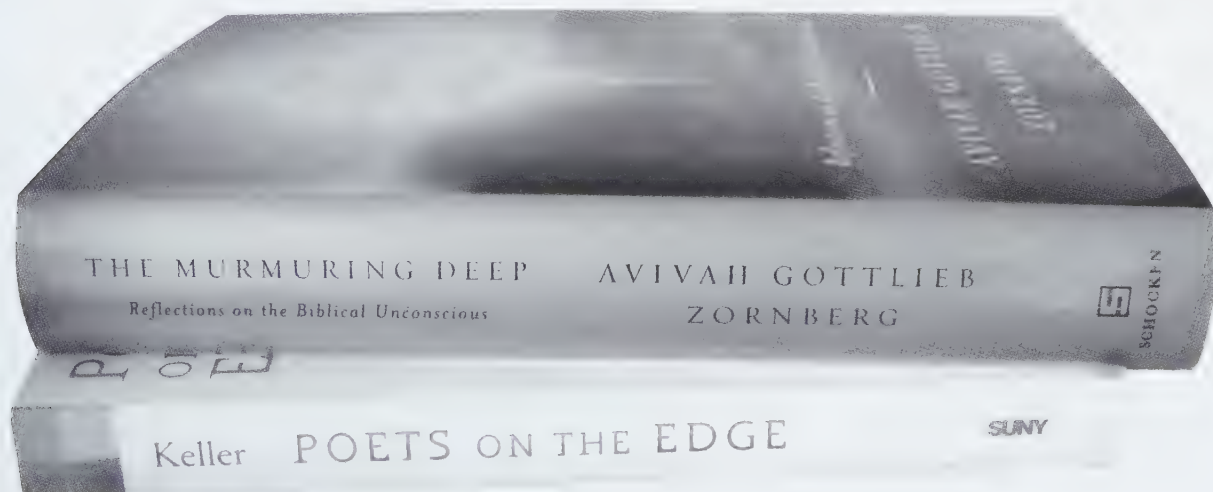
JORDANA HORN

More Than "The Lord's My Shepherd"

Psalms can matter in our lives today

Psalms of the Jewish Liturgy (Aviv Press, \$17.95) by **Miriyam Glazer** is designed to bring readers greater access to the many psalms that appear in weekday, Shabbat and holiday services.

The subtitle, "A Guide to Their Beauty, Power and Meaning," aptly describes Glazer's approach. The book's down-to-earth language and examples from daily life help the psalms feel relevant to contemporary readers, as in Glazer's discussion of salvation in the context of Hallel (Psalms 113–118): "Indeed, what these ancient psalms most remarkably express is the ecstasy of salvation, both personal and collective: the salvation of the people and nation of Israel, and the salvation of every individual who has suffered poverty, serious illness, infertility, crippling fear, anguish, despair."



Glazer delves into individual psalms of the liturgy, but also helps readers to understand the message of each of the units of liturgical psalms: Psalms for the Days of the Week, Daily Psalms, Hallel Kabbalat Shabbat, Psalms for Shabbat morning, and so on.

Glazer also offers her own translation of all the psalms she discusses. Translating psalms today requires considerable boldness. Robert Alter's 2007 *Book of Psalms* sets a high standard; as poem-prayers, Glazer's translations are excellent, written in poetic, flowing English. At times ambiguities or ideas that may offend our sensibilities in the original text are obscured in Glazer's effort to make a readable, pray-able, translation.

Glazer's translations and commentaries by and large avoid discussions of the Hebrew text, focused as she is on an English-speaking audience. This is perhaps an asset for beginning readers, but a drawback for a more learned audience. Moreover, the book would be far more useful as a teaching tool if it included verse numbers in the Hebrew and English texts of the psalms. The book also lacks discussion of either traditional or modern critical commentaries of the psalms. In all fairness, though, these are clearly outside the scope of the purpose of the book, which is to provide access to the psalms for a contemporary, English-speaking audience.

Glazer is adept at directing readers back to the prayer experience of psalms, which is clearly close to her heart: "No summary of the themes of the opening psalms can convey the richness and power of the process of praying them," she writes. "The words and images of the psalms come alive only in the process of getting to know them, by coming into relationship with them, by allowing yourself to feel them. The process is unique for each of us."

RABBI GAIL DIAMOND

Mentoring Matters

For poets—as for the rest of us—role models

"I don't think I would be a writer today had I not, at some point, decided I had the

right," writes poet Kristen Prevallet. Many of the poets in *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections* (University of Iowa Press, \$24.95) describe such moments, when the decision to write took on a sudden necessity and significance. Editors **Arielle Greenberg** and **Rachel Zucker**, poets themselves, compiled essays by

writers. Jorie Graham taught Katie Ford that "the decision to write poems is... to live inside one's difficulties, to inhabit them, to trespass against the solitudes they wish to keep." Erika Meitner, a first-generation Jewish American poet who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Jewish Studies, learns that in order to take risks in writing, one

Younger poets learn from their mentors not only how to craft their poems, but how to carve out lives for themselves as women writers.

women poets born in the 1960s and '70s writing about their mentors, enabling us to watch these women find their voices and come of age under the knowing gaze of the generation of women poets who came before them.

The mentoring relationships depicted in these essays are as rich and varied as the poets themselves. Cin Salach's relationship with her mentor Maureen Seaton evolves into a love affair; Rebecca Wolfe's mentorship with Molly Peacock begins in ninth grade and spans a decade. Some poets are most influenced by their mentor's poems: reading Denise Duhamel's poem "Bulimia" gave Beth Ann Fennelly "the courage to be unsavory"; Valerie Martinez writes: "Joy Harjo's poetry has been a force against my own destruction." It is this sense of urgency that colors many of these poets' early experiences as writers, and their mentors give them permission to speak their truths, to go against the grain of what is expected of them as both writers and women.

Some of the poets do not know their mentors personally (and Kirsten Kaschock's essay is titled "on Being Nonmentored"), but for the poets who do, their mentoring relationships are intimate and involved. They not only learn how to craft their poems, but how to carve out lives for themselves as women

must take risks in life. Each time Meitner runs into her mentor Rita Dove, Dove has taken up something new, from singing lessons to target practice in a shooting range. Dove teaches Meitner that "you have to learn how to truly inhabit and push against the world rather than move through it as an afterthought."

The woman-to-woman mentorships described in *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections* are inspiring and serve as a reminder of the timelessness and unique importance of such relationships in the lives of young women. The book would make the perfect gift for an aspiring woman writer, but would appeal to anyone interested in the lively and absorbing stories of 24 women writers on the brink of discovery.

WENDY WISNER

The Poetics of Dislocation

Interwoven histories, in a terrific new poetry collection

This debut book of poems by **Idra Novey**—*The Next Country* (Alice James Books, \$14.95)—opens with the surreal "Aubade for Vinã del Mar," where a violin suddenly and magically grows in the pocket of the speaker's coat. An

aubade is traditionally a poem about lovers separating at dawn, and Vinã del Mar—the love-subject of this piece—is a Chilean coastal city. Part Isabel Allende, and part Marc Chagall, this poem serves as a pitch-perfect invocation for a lyric collection that is ultimately as much about love as it is about geography—both the particular geography of Chile, and the more abstract backdrops of unspecified countries and cities. These unnamed place-poems, like “East of Here,” speak in a sure and ghostly voice about vague locations where simultaneously hopeless and magical things happen:

*In the next country over, the lotus
is chocolate-brown and grows tall
as maize. The sole religion seems
to be bread, any kind, including
one similar to rye, but made of lotus.
And if someone you've doted on
dies there defending
the nation, seven emissaries
for the president come by,
all wearing stethoscopes,
and listen to your heart.*

Novey's collection deftly navigates complex ideas about politics, history, and memory by creating timeless allegories in poems like “At Some Point After We Sealed the Windows,” “The Experiment,” and “A History in Six Couplets,” that offer her readers glimpses of slightly apocalyptic future-pasts filled with hungry children and circling dogs, where “Gradually / we stopped calling out // to each other in the dark.”

Novey doesn't stop calling out to her reader, however. In these poems, the political and historical is also entwined with the deeply personal. Many address her biracial family, mother-daughter relationships, and the often-overlooked landscape of Appalachia, where Novey was raised—“the row / of weathered tobacco shacks” in “Maddox Road” where “pick-ups shudder past, invisible after nightfall, / and between them the call of an owl.” The vivid, melancholic imagery in this collection speaks of a certain sense of dislocation; Novey seems equally as alienated from her rural hometown landscape

as she does from her husband's native Chile—and she wonders “whose country is more forgiving” in “Second Snow.”

In the first of a series of poems—one in each of the four sections of the book—entitled “Scenes From Moving Vehicles,” we open with a dark-haired girl riding in a car; “the border guards mistook her / for an immigrant, sneaking in / with this swell American family,” so the girl escapes, leaves her family behind, but realizes in the poem's last line that she's made a mistake. There is a deep feeling of un-belonging in these poems—of being loosed from every landscape, of being a perpetual émigré—and this gives Novey's collection a Jewish flavor, whether intentional or not. *The Next Country* is a quiet beauty of a book.

ERIKA MEITNER

Fiction Faces the Holocaust

Where the Trauma Began

A novel traces an intricate European family history

In *Fault Lines* (Grove, \$14.00), Nancy Huston tells the story of four generations of a family fractured by its collision with Nazi Germany. In reverse chronological order Huston introduces us to a series of three six-year-old, first-person narrators, each one an only child who is the sole vessel for the previous generations' grief. In the novel's last section we finally meet Erra, the child who was the great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother of the previous sections. She appears the best-adjusted member of her family, but it is her personal trauma, which surprisingly she seems to have survived unscathed, which has shattered her descendants.

Fault Lines is a book about the wrong kind of inheritance—the damage that parents unwittingly pass onto their children and the resulting, superior perception of children over their blinded parents. While the secret of Erra's childhood is the driving force of the narrative, her neglected daughter Sadie, its first inheri-

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tor, becomes the novel's central figure. Erra wants to bury her harrowing past, but Sadie is compelled to spend her entire life digging it up, and to force her son, grandson, and even her mother to confront it with her. "It's for your sake, too, you know?" she explains to her son. "I mean, how can we build a future together if we don't know the truth about our past, right?" At 26, Sadie uncovers the outlines of her mother's secret. The remainder of the novel is thus driven not by suspense, but by character development in reverse. The reader sees how the child becomes the man by meeting the man first.

As if their shared family history isn't enough, Huston gives them another, strange inheritance: a mole that serves as imaginary friend, evil demon, and silent witness to all four of the characters whose skin it marks. The reader first learns about the mole—though not its significance—from Sol, Sadie's self-centered, perverted, coddled grandson, the product of 21st century indulgences, not the 20th century's horrors. His personal drama first intersects with the awful family history when he is forced to have the mole removed, and later when he relates, bored and annoyed, how Sadie drags the entire family to Erra's childhood home. Is he disconnected from the thread that tied the previous three generations together because it was literally carved out of his cheek?

We back into the novel's secret at the end, but the moral comes at the beginning with Sol's story. Time may heal all wounds, but brings with it new ones. Each section renews this notion: When the child who is the future is already so damaged, does it matter what happened to the parent who made it so? It does in *Fault Lines*, which makes peeling back the layers such a satisfying reading experience.

TAMMY HEPPS

New Zealand, Sweden, Warsaw.

The Jewish drama persists

Adam Anker, the narrator of the novel *Sonata for Miriam* by **Linda Olsson** (Penguin, \$15.00), begins his tale by

describing the blank that is the canvas of his life, then slowly filling in the picture plane. The initial strokes limn a day in which Adam, a musician and professor, visits the Holocaust Gallery of a New Zealand museum and discovers an important clue to his past. At virtually the same moment, Miriam—Adam's college-age daughter—dies in an accident.

To recover from this tragedy—and begin to understand himself—Adam must assemble a self-portrait out of fragments while sharing with the reader what he has sidelined in order to make a life in New Zealand. Buried in the past is a Holocaust drama, concerning Adam's unreadable and sorrowful mother and the father Adam never knew. Adam travels to his boyhood home in Warsaw, and then to the home of Cecilia, Miriam's artist-mother, who lives on an island off the Swedish coast.

Adam and Cecilia—as well as many of the novel's secondary characters—construct their lives around absence; they are largely defined by losses that they cannot or will not transcend. This hauntedness gives the book its poetic intensity, but also its sense of melodrama. The lyrical largely wins out, and the novel's descriptions of place are particularly lovely. Olsson speaks of Warsaw as having "the gentle, filtered light of the Old World" and of the "sad, surreal pallor" of a rainy day in Sweden. Adam's existential passion—his desire for meaning in a life hollowed out by grief—makes for a page-turner, leading Adam to tales of desperation, great love, family drama, art theft, musical genius and more. Adam's romantic passion, however, often feels overwrought. He recounts parting from Cecilia by saying, "You tore yourself free, turned abruptly, and walked across the room, out into the rain. I sank to my knees and curled up with my hands between my thighs."

The novel means to fashion itself as a song, a sonata that works mightily not to become a dirge. By the end, though, the novel reads as a landscape, the details of place part of what enchants the reader and ultimately helps Olsson's characters begin to heal.

DEBRA SPARK

Secrets Revealed Slowly

Her Transylvanian childhood re-asserts itself in Israel

Childhood traumas cast a long shadow in *Laundry* by **Suzanne Adam**, translated from the Hebrew by Becka Mara McKay (Autumn Hill Books, \$16.95). The protagonists of the novel, Ephraim and his wife Ildiko, also called by her Hebrew name, Chavatzet, are a young couple building lives in Israel in the shadow of their families' experiences in Transylvania—and in Ildiko's case, her own experience as a young child hiding there after the Holocaust. As the book opens, their lives have mysteriously fallen apart—Ildiko is nearly catatonic in the wake of a recent, unnamed tragedy, and Ephraim and Ildiko's mother and sister are in a whirlwind of worry. Ephraim cocoons himself in the house with his traumatized wife, who eventually reveals her haunting story.

Frantic first-person narration mimics the characters' emotional states. Ildiko's voice is slower than Ephraim's, occasionally interrupted by his pleas that she speed up the story so he can begin to make sense of it all. Her insistence that she can only tell each thing as it happened, in the voice of her five-year-old, then six-year-old, then seven-year-old self, through to adulthood, is frustrating to Ephraim as it is to the reader, who still does not know what has triggered this crisis.

In between the pieces of Ildiko's story, Ephraim reveals some of his own past: his angry, dissatisfied Holocaust survivor mother, his solace in his work as a gardener and his falling in love with Ildiko. He is also trying to calm Ildiko's mother and sister while sharing with them Ildiko's unfolding story about the sustained psychological abuse she suffered in Transylvania at the hands of a local teenage girl, Yutzi, who worked in the local slaughterhouse and was adored by the rest of the family. Yutzi terrorized the young Ildiko, threatening that if the girl told her parents about the treatment, she would be disemboweled like the cows.

The author's strategy of not revealing what has precipitated the crisis until nearly the end of the book eventually obscures

the suspense rather than heightening it. Nonetheless, the story exposes hard truths about family secrets and psychological trauma, and offers a rare glimpse of life in post-war Transylvania.

RAHEL LERNER

Our Reviewers

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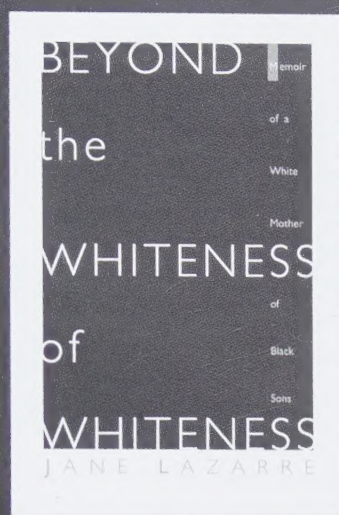
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DEBRA SPARK's third novel—*Good for the Jews*—will be published in fall of 2009.

WENDY WISNER's first book of poems, *Epicenter*, was published in 2004.



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HAPPENING



Grace Paley: Collected Shorts

A firebrand for decades, short-story writer Grace Paley opposed war and nuclear proliferation and fought for women's rights and the preservation of the environment. Though her steadfast activism often landed her in jail, she demonstrated how one person can make a difference. Lilly Rivlin's new film about Paley, now in its final stages, includes exclusive interviews with friends, family, students and colleagues, including Alice Walker and Vivian Gornick, plus material from Paley's own archives. See a clip of the work at gracepaleythefilm.com.

Modern Day Sex Slaves in Israel

Horrifyingly, Israel has become a destination country for human trafficking. Government sources approximate that 3000 women, most from the Former Soviet Union, have been smuggled into the country over the Egyptian border. Once in Israel, victims are repeatedly sold and resold to pimps and brothel owners, and are forced to work in slavery-like conditions. They are ruthlessly abused and exploited, suffering severe beatings, rape and sometimes even starvation. Atzum is an organization working to compel the Israeli government to combat trafficking via prevention and

border closure, protection of those women who escape their owners, and prosecution of smugglers and pimps. atzum.org.il

Welcoming the Birth of a Daughter

A new English and Hebrew web resource at itim.org.il enables parents to access ceremonies and traditions for Simchat Bat and Zeved Habat (baby girl naming ceremonies) and create their own. "As a father of three girls, I have long been an advocate of the development by the traditional Jewish community of a ceremony that welcomes infant girls," says Aryeh Rubin, whose Targum Shlishi foundation made this site possible. (Rubin assembled a manual of the Simchat Bat ceremony for his daughter Maya's birth in 1996, available at targumshlishi.org/Simchat-Bat.pdf.)

The National Jewish Deaf Singles Registry

Deaf Jews often feel excluded from Jewish activities, and instead affiliate with the positive and often more welcoming general deaf community and culture. A new program of the Orthodox Union's Yachad: National Jewish Council for Disabilities holds social events for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Their Jewish Deaf Singles Registry coordinates singles events and circulates a newsletter that includes personal ads for deaf Jewish singles, with levels of religious Jewish affiliation from unaffiliated to Orthodox. njcd.org

With All Your Heart

A groundbreaking new edition of the Friday night prayer book of New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah expands definitions of Jewish family and community to explicitly embrace lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families. Edited by Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, it includes readings from Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, Walt Whitman, Yehuda Amichai, and Rachel the Poet; a section on AIDS, Yiddish writing, American folk anthems,

prayers and readings on disability, the environment, and social justice, and prayers for coming out and for marking a transgender experience. There's feminine God language in Hebrew for many prayers and the inclusion of concubines Bilhah and Zilpah along with matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, recognizing all of our mothers, not just the legally married ones. The siddur alters heterosexual references to God's love for Israel; for example, changing "as the groom rejoices in the bride" to "as the heart rejoices in love." The prayer book is intended for Jews from a broad spectrum of Jewish practice and of every sexual orientation and gender identity; there's even an accompanying musical CD. cbst.org/NewSiddur.shtml

Writings by Survivors of Sexual Abuse.

For an anthology to be published by Safer Society Press (safersociety.org) submissions of poems, essays, short stories, and short plays—written by survivors can be sent by August 15 to Marjorie Ryerson, Editorial Director, Safer Society Press, P.O. Box 340, Brandon, VT 05733. marjorie@safersociety.org; 802-247-3132.



Unmasked

"The Ariella Dadon Story," a startling cartoon in Hebrew and in English by Inbal Freund Novick and Chari Pere, tells how a 28-year-old abused wife obtained a *get*, the Jewish divorce,

after years of struggle. The political cartoon is intended to educate people about *agunot*—women "chained" to their husbands under Jewish law—and encourages prevention of this status through premarital agreements. unmaskedcomic.com.



Helen Suzman

who died January 1 at 91, was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her pursuit of justice in South Africa. A member of the South African Parliament from 1953–1989, she was for years that body's sole opposition voice condemning apartheid. A traveling exhibition explores Suzman's life and vision through photographs, letters, speeches and news articles. Organized by the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, it also tells of the animosity, anti-Semitism and intimidation Suzman faced, and highlights her friendship with Nelson Mandela. The U.S. tour of the exhibit is funded by the Dobkin and Tollan Family Foundations. You can check the schedule, see artifacts from the exhibition, and view a video of Suzman's daughter, Frances Joel, talking about her mother's life at Helensuzmanexhibition.com.

Suzman is also featured in a new documentary now in production. The film, "Breaking the Rules," focuses on white South Africans who fought against apartheid. Director Carolyn Projansky interviewed Suzman over four years (see photo on right), with the final recorded interview taking place in December 2008, one month before Suzman's death. Co-produced by Projansky and Susan Barocas, the film will be released in 2011. For a trailer: breakingtherulesmovie.com.

Combo Deal — a Mitzvah & Social Gathering All in One

JCorps is a volunteer-run, non-denominational, international social volunteer network for Jews ages 18–28. Small groups volunteer together in hunger relief, senior care, children's hospitals, urban renewal, and environmental projects. Founded in NYC, it now operates in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Montreal, Toronto, Los Angeles and London. More at jcorps.org.

Reach Out to Cuban Jews Through Music

Ladino rock musician Sarah Aroeste and Cuban-American musician Roberto Rodriguez are collecting Jewish CDs (classical, folk, klezmer, Sephardic, Israeli, punk, jazz, kids, hip hop—in short, everything)—plus songbooks and listening devices of every sort in order to establish music libraries in Cuba. The first will be housed in the largest synagogue in Havana, with satellites in Camaguey, Santiago, Guantanamo, Santa Clara and Cienfuegos. Send your tunes

and paraphernalia to: Aroeste Music LLC, Attn: Cuba-Jewish Music Project, 255 W. 108th St., #5B, New York, NY 10025. The project also needs suitcases (worn ones are fine) and individuals traveling to Cuba to help with transport. You can get details at saraharoeste.com.

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, check out WHAT'S NEW on the Lilith homepage: www.Lilith.org where you can also sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to info@Lilith.org

—compiled by Naomi Danis



Gringa Guilt and Housework

by JANICE EIDUS

On a July afternoon, in a picture-book-perfect, colonial Mexican town, high in the mountains, my five-year-old daughter, who is adopted from Guatemala, draws happily with markers in the shaded corner of the otherwise sun-dappled patio of our brightly colored, art-and-plant filled Mexican *casa*. My husband and I bought this house six years ago, and we're deeply attached to it, although we're able to stay here just a few months of each year. Our demanding jobs back home in New York City, where we live in a two-bedroom apartment, approximately one-fifth the size of this house, preclude longer vacations. When we're not here, we keep the *casa* rented.

I watch my daughter as she bends her head intently over her coloring book. Her long, black hair, loose and shimmering, falls across her heart-shaped face, and I note, not for the first time, how much she resembles (far more than she resembles me) the sisters-in-law, *Señoras* Carmen and Silvia, who clean our *casa* and cook our meals.

If my Brooklyn-born, lower-middle-class parents—both avowed, lifelong left-wingers—were alive to see me today, they would be horrified. They, who raised me and my siblings in a wonderfully integrated and diverse (sometimes dangerous) Bronx housing project, never wavered from their progressive social and political beliefs, which did not include “hiring others to do our so-called dirty work,” as my unfashionably dressed, sensible-shoe wearing mother had declared one afternoon after we'd returned from an awkward, never-to-be repeated visit to the opulent home of her suburban Republican cousin, who employed a live-in maid, a gardener, and a cook.

Expanding upon my mother's words, my always loud and didactic father said, with great feeling, “All the work in one's home is noble and honest! Grow up”—he looked hard at me and my sister and brother, although at me most of all, the sloppiest and most rebellious of the three of us—“and do all your own work!”

Were he and my mother visiting me today in my Mexican *casa*, they also would bring up, with self-righteous passion, the fact that my daughter's ancestral history in Guatemala very likely contains numerous sad, and enraging, stories of cinnamon-skinned women who did all sorts of “so-called dirty work” for low—or no—pay and who were horrifically exploited by unfeeling, imperialistic *gringos* and *gringas* who very much resemble me.

My parents would be right, of course. But here's my dilemma: I hate doing housework. And so, despite my own progressive social and political beliefs, I can't stop myself from taking advantage of the fact that, here in Mexico, I can afford to pay someone else to do it for me.

As a child, back in the Bronx, in our claustrophobically small kitch-

en in the housing project, day after day, I watched my mother as she swept, dusted, washed, and wiped, while my father, despite his rhetoric about “noble, honorable work,” never once lifted a finger to help her to do what to him was “women's work” and, therefore, beneath him. I swore to myself, like so many rebellious daughters before me, that I would grow up to be *nothing* like my mother. I assured myself that such pointless, trivial domestic tasks were beneath me, too.

I was wrong, of course. As an adult, I quickly discovered what the point was of all that seemingly endless sweeping, mopping, washing, and dusting: Living among filth is disgusting. Women's work or not, I didn't want to live surrounded by clutter, *schmutz*, and all the vermin that *schmutz* attracts. Fairly quickly, I came to see that there's nothing intrinsically demeaning about taking care of one's home and that, in fact, housework really is honest and noble work.

But, I still loathe doing it.

Therefore, for two fabulous months each year, I do no housework at all. *Señoras* Carmen and Silvia sometimes laughingly tease me, speaking slowly because they know how primitive my Spanish is: “*Señora* Janice, we don't believe that you know how to boil water or sweep a floor!”

In my grammatically flawed Spanish, I laughingly respond, “*En mi casa en Nueva York*,” I do both of these tasks, plus more. “But not,” I add honestly, “as well as you do them, *Señoras*!”

Casting their eyes to the floor, they shyly and graciously accept my compliment, and then they tell me how glad they are to be in my employ. “*Mucho gusto*, *Señora* Janice,” they smile. Silvia adds that it is the money she earns working for me that enables her to send her son to college, a dream she never thought would come true.

Now it's my turn to cast my eyes downward, embarrassed by the power imbalance in our relationship.

“Mama!” my daughter suddenly exclaims, from across the patio, breaking my train of thought. She puts down her coloring book and crayons and comes to stand beside me.

“Yes, sweetheart?” I shade my eyes and look directly into her dark ones, amazed, as I so often am, by the absolute ferocity of my love for her.

“I want to go help Silvia and Carmen,” she said.

“*Seguro*,” I say, nodding, speaking in my stilted Spanish, trying as best I can, in my Jewish *gringa* way, to keep her connected to the language of her birth country. ■

Janice Eidus's novel *The War of the Rosens* won an independent Publisher Book Award; her forthcoming novel is *The Last Jewish Virgin*. This piece is reprinted by permission from “*The Color of Cinnamon*,” part of the anthology *DIRT: Quirks, Habits, and Passions of Keeping House* (Seal Press, 2009).

